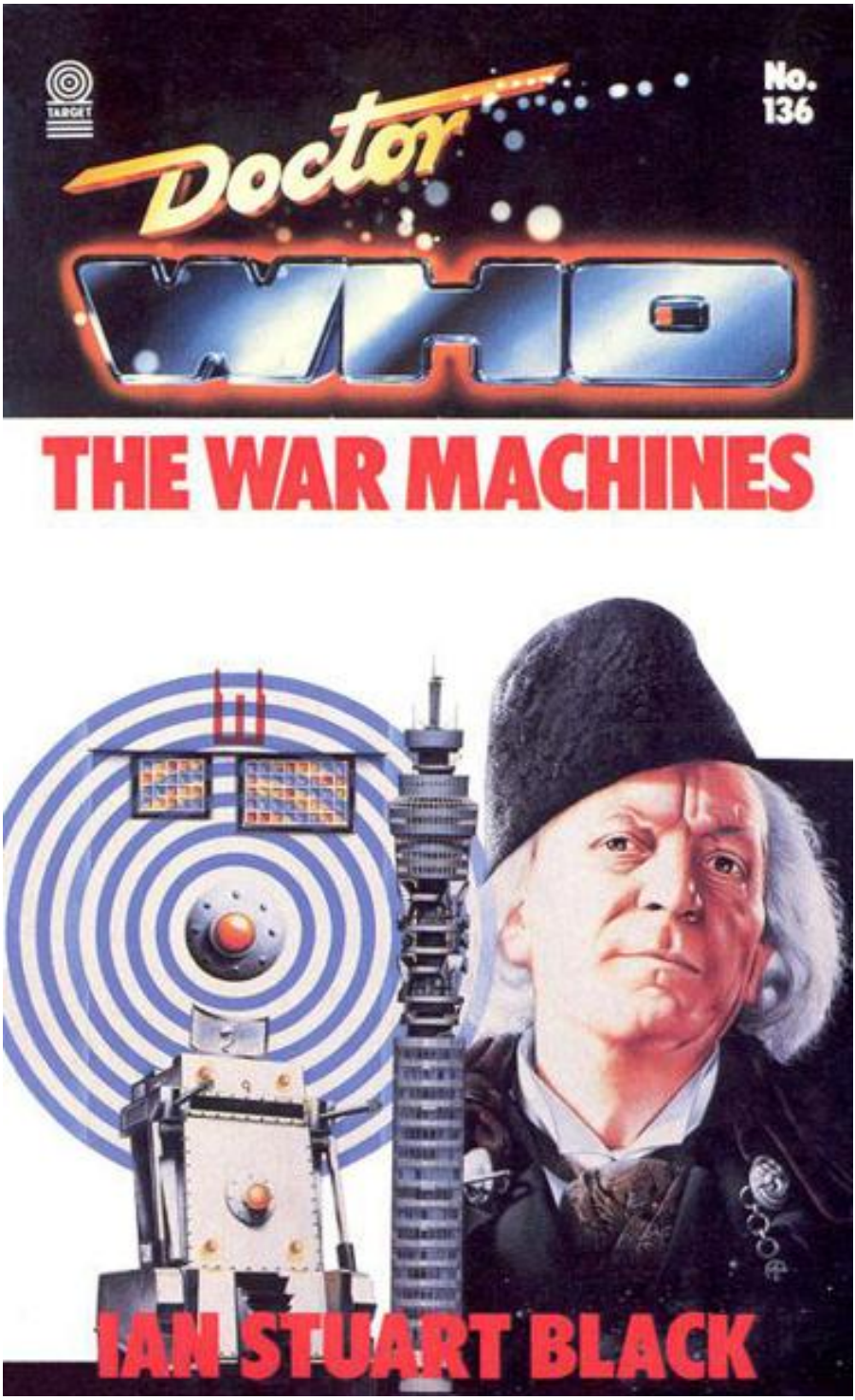
TARGET

No. 136

Doctor WHO

# THE WAR MACHINES

IAN STUART BLACK




London, 1966 – when the TARDIS materialises outside the Post Office Tower the Doctor becomes aware of a powerful and evil force nearby,

so he and the ever-curious Dodo set off to investigate.

Inside the tower they track down the source of power to Professor Brett and WOTAN, his revolutionary new computer.

Designed as a universal problem solver, WOTAN

has suddenly began to think for itself and has formulated a deadly plan. Using its phenomenal power it will programme humans to build mobile fighting computers, and with these

indestructible war machines WOTAN will take over the world...

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DOCTOR WHO

THE WAR MACHINES

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**IAN STUART BLACK**

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**CONTENTS**

1 The Home-Coming

2 The Super-Computer

3 A Night Out

4 Servant turned Master

5 Putting the Team Together

6 Working for the Cause

7 A Demonstration of Power

8 The One Who Got Away

9 Attack and Defence

10 Taking to the Streets

11 Setting the Trap

12 The Showdown

13 We Can't Stay Long

**1**

**The Home-Coming**

'Right on time!' called the Doctor.

Of course he knew that in one sense Time was a fiction

– an attempt by man to measure duration with reference to the sun and stars. But he also knew that although such measurements were based on an impressive formula, all man's concepts were fraught with error. Time was not as it was supposed to be, for here they were, he and his single crew-member, Dodo, travelling fortuitously across space, splitting Time into fragments – or more exactly, ignoring the passage of time, the rising and setting of the sun, the ebb and flow of tides, the coming and going of the galaxy in which they voyaged.

‘Stand by!’ called the Doctor. He had a split-second awareness of where they were, and knew how much it would mean to the girl, this home-coming.

‘I’m logging it on the computers,’ Dodo told him. ‘I’ve timed the entries. You can see it on the graph.’

It was odd she should talk about time. They had their own time in this encapsulated world of theirs, the TARDIS.

‘Watch the screen,’ she said proudly. ‘Pressing "Re-call".’

The graph came up, a bold, splendid curve. Their progress was unblemished. He could predict exactly where they would materialise, but he said nothing. Mixed with the pleasure he felt about their arrival, the Doctor experienced a sense of concern, as though he were being given a whispered warning, an uneasy sensation.

Dodo manipulated the instruments, sending a stream of data across the screen. In the past Steven had handled this task, but now he was no longer with them, she had taken over such calculations. It was still a new toy to her.

There was a brief, panoramic image of the city into whose ambit they were emerging. Tall buildings were springing up where once Georgian squares had stood, where the rubble of a recent war had lain. Now the city had been rebuilt, and London rose, very much as it was... And yet to the Doctor’s eyes, also very different. One style was going – one tempo was giving place to another. A generation had grown up which hardly remembered the carnage and they were reconstructing their own capital.

Perhaps the thing that caught the Doctor’s attention –

before he even saw it, in fact – was the tall, graceful tower that stood head and shoulders above the rest of London.

What was it they had called it? The Post Office Tower? In all probability they would change that name, but that was what they had first called it. ‘The Post Office Tower,’ he repeated to himself. A symbol of recovery, he thought with satisfaction. He had always enjoyed England, and in spite of this warning whisper he looked forward to this visit. It was almost a holiday feeling.

He looked up at the screen. ‘Do you know where you are?’ he called.

Dodo saw the flickering pictures as they homed in. The focus steadied and cleared. The scene was suddenly familiar – and yet she didn't recognise everything... She couldn't be sure... But there! The bridges across the Thames! The Parks! The great sprawling city!

'It's London!' she shouted. She could hardly believe it!

They had returned to her own town...! But when? How much later than when she had last been here?

Or perhaps it was earlier? That confused her. How could she be in a place... her own world... older, even wiser... yet before she had left? Perhaps before she was born?

The Doctor must have caught her thoughts. 'A little time has passed, Dodo. You won't be out of place. What has happened – or not happened – will synchronise with you and you will be totally accepted. You are back home.'

As they seemed to settle – that was the way she thought of it as the TARDIS materialised – the pulse died in the dynamos and she could hardly wait to get out, to see her own people again, to breathe her own air, mix with her own kind and be back in a world she had thought she would never see again.

The Doctor watched, saying nothing, but guessing that she had travelled with him for the last time. He would miss her – as indeed he regretted losing so many of his fellow-travellers.

The scanner played over the city below them. The sensors of the TARDIS – programmed by the Doctor over many journeys – fed responses to the Control factor– that area the Doctor thought of as the brain.

He drew her attention to the pictures on the screen.

People were hurrying along a crowded street.

'Do you see any changes?' he asked.

She began to laugh. 'Look at their hair! The length of it.

Even the men!'

The Doctor saw little to laugh about. His own hair was as long as any man's in the streets of London on this spring day in the 1960s.

‘And the skirts!’ Dodo pointed. ‘They’re even shorter!

And so many are in jeans. What’s happened to the old

"short back and sides", and the smart jacket and ties?’

‘There are some,’ pointed out the Doctor.

‘Not many.’

The screen showed a busy road, not far from elegant Regent Street.

‘It’s like a holiday town,’ said Dodo. ‘I don’t remember all those boutiques, and that sort of music playing.

Certainly not from shops... And all the people are so young! It’s as though a new generation has taken over London.’

‘They’ve taken quite a step in that direction,’ agreed the Doctor a little critically.

The scanner panned along a narrow alleyway. Perhaps it was still searching for an appropriate place to ‘land’. As they panned past the corner, Dodo saw the street name.

‘Carnaby Street,’ she frowned. ‘I don’t remember that. It wasn’t there before.’

‘Everything changes,’ said the Doctor. ‘It’s all a fashion, my dear. What you and I think is solid and permanent, is only a passing shadow. Part of the time you lived in – your own time – is a memory to these young people.’

A quiet, old-fashioned London square, one that had as yet not suffered the planners’ vandalism, came up on the screen, and she guessed this was where they would make contact with Earth.

The outer door opened, but at the last moment Dodo didn’t race out into the sunlight. She hesitated, running her hand over the structure of the ‘ship’ around her. She had grown to love it – perhaps like the cave, the primitive safe place that mankind – and certainly womankind – had relied on since the beginning of time. And now, all at once, she had a feeling she was saying goodbye.

‘Come along!’ called the Doctor breezily. He was not one for sentimental moments, nor for prolonging partings.

He strode sharply to the door.

And Dodo hurried after him.

The square was something of a cul-de-sac, and the corner in which the TARDIS had materialised was tucked out of the way.

A few pedestrians hurried past, and a couple came out of one of the houses. No one seemed to notice anything unusual.

The Doctor took a deep breath, savouring the bright morning. 'Wonderful,' he said. 'Wonderful! What a pleasure to find ourselves here.'

'What a home-coming!' said Dodo.

'So you know where you are?' he teased her.

'Of course. It's marvellous to be back. It's ages since I was here.'

He looked at her drily. 'When you've seen as many ages as I have, you won't use that term so freely. In fact, it's been no time at all.'

'Right, Doctor. Let's get moving.'

He was carrying a placard which he began to fix to the door of the TARDIS. As he stepped back she saw it was a printed sign. It read: 'OUT OF ORDER'.

She laughed. 'What's that for?'

He looked reproving. 'The problem about being back in the twentieth century is that the TARDIS could easily be taken to be what it appears to be... if you follow me.'

Dodo lifted a finger. 'Test Number One coming up,' she said.

The young police officer had turned the corner. He saw the TARDIS, then walked towards it. He had put his hand on the door when he saw the sign, gave a grunt of annoyance and hurried away.

'Test Number One, okay,' said the Doctor with satisfaction.

'But no one can get in anyhow,' said Dodo. 'I mean, not even the police could open the door.'

The Doctor gave a thin smile. 'Exactly... otherwise Scotland Yard

could be whipped off into time and space.'

Dodo was impatient. 'Come on, Doc.' She strode ahead.

A tall shadow lay at an angle across the square. As they reached it the Doctor looked up, sunlight causing him to screw up his eyes.

'So that's it,' he said.

'What is?' Dodo didn't stop walking.

'The Tower,' the Doctor told her. 'The Post Office Tower. Look!' He pointed to where it rose not far away –

tall, graceful, dramatic. 'It's finished,' he said.

She stopped and looked up. She wasn't sure whether the building had been started when she was last in London, and now it was complete – a landmark, a symbol of a new age.

Even Dodo was impressed.

As the Doctor murmured to himself, 'Very impressive,'

she had a sense of pride.

'Fab, isn't it? That's something Steven would have approved of.' Steven, her fellow space-traveller, was still very much in her thoughts.

'Steven is too far away, and too busy right now,' said the Doctor, 'to worry about...' He hesitated.

She stared at him. 'What's there to worry about?'

He made light of it. 'There's always something, you know. Things that need ironing out.'

She scoffed. 'You're imagining things.'

He looked at her. 'You should know better than to say that, my child.'

She caught the serious note in his voice. 'What is it, Doctor?'

'I don't know exactly. Just something alien.' He looked at the Tower again.

'Something to do with that?'

‘It could be… I’m not sure… but something… Not quite a threat… but…’ He made a gesture. ‘I just scent it.’

‘You scent it?’ Dodo grinned. ‘That’s good old London smog.’

He might have pointed out how free the city was from smoke, but he was too absorbed.

As they left the square, he stopped and pulled back the sleeve of his jacket.

‘What’s the matter, Doctor?’

‘A prickling sensation,’ he said.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Our nervous system gives us messages, Dodo. If we care to listen to them,’ he said.

She could hardly take him seriously. On this sunny morning in familiar London there was nothing but harmony and light.

‘Look at my skin,’ he said. ‘It’s like being stung by nettles. I get it when something threatens – something powerful and inhuman.’

‘Inhuman?’

‘It’s very like my reaction to the presence of the Daleks,’

he added.

‘Daleks? What are they?’

‘Ah. You haven’t met my old enemies, have you? And I trust you never will.’

He came to an abrupt decision… out of nowhere, it seemed to Dodo.

‘I must investigate that Tower,’ he said, and set off smartly.

Dodo trailed along in his wake. It wasn’t exactly the first thing she would have done on this home-coming, but the Doctor was determined, and anyhow it was a pleasure just to walk through the streets.

They stopped once not far from the Tower.

‘I remember a little milk-bar near here,’ said the Doctor.

‘We could both do with refreshment.’

‘A milk-bar? What’s that?’ Dodo had never heard of one.

‘Ah, yes. Before your time,’ said the Doctor. ‘I wonder what is all the rage today.’ He found the building and gave it a quick glance before they went in. ‘Roughly the same idea,’ he said. ‘But not milk. More like coffee. At least I hope it’s coffee that comes from that contraption.’

A great metal instrument with an array of pipes, steamed behind the counter.

‘Two espressos coming up!’ said the assistant by way of greeting.

‘Taste’s not bad,’ said Dodo, after they settled into an alcove. Round them was a sprinkling of customers, young office workers and the like.

‘From the Post Office,’ said the Doctor. ‘Engineers, technicians, I suppose. They must employ quite an army to keep today’s communication system going.’

He took a batch of papers from an inside pocket. It always amazed Dodo how much the Doctor managed to carry on his person. He would delve into his floppy, velvet jacket, and fumble through documents, scraps of scribbled formulae, a diary, some letters...

‘Ah, this could be it.’

He began to make notes, putting odd pages together, while Dodo watched the crowd around her. She would have liked to join in the conversation, but it was best to listen, to pick up bits of news that gave her an idea what had been happening.

The Doctor looked up from his papers. ‘Did you ever come across one of my former companions, Ian Chesterton?’ and before she had time to reply he answered himself: ‘No, of course not. That was long before our paths crossed. A clever fellow, Mr Chesterton. A name to be conjured with. I imagine in today’s world of Technology, a name to be respected. I shouldn’t wonder if he didn’t have some hand in establishing this very system.’

‘What system?’

‘This famous Tower... Yes, Ian would probably have trained today’s scientists... Now, let me think.’ He made some quick calculations. ‘It’s so easy to get one’s dates mixed, what with all this jumping about in time. But I suppose he turned out to be a professor or a don, or whatever they call them. Anyhow, he made a big impact on science at the start of this decade. So I’ll take a chance.’

He was writing out what looked like an official document, stamping it with a seal which appeared as if by magic from another pocket; adding signatures, one after another – none of them his own.

‘And there should be a covering letter... An introduction... Let’s see. From whom? The PM? No, not a politician. That might be considered a little vulgar. More like... Yes. From a university colleague. Nothing too ostentatious. From a serious scientist. Someone who would appear to be my own age. That should win confidence.’

She saw the ease with which he appeared to forge the letter of introduction – although the word ‘forge’ never occurred to her. If the Doctor required these documents it could only be for a good reason.

He appeared to read her thoughts. ‘The end justifies the means,’ he said soberly. ‘After all, if what I fear is the case, we cannot be too fastidious with our methods.’

‘Just as you say, Doc,’ she agreed. She admitted to herself that she had no idea what he was talking about.

But he seemed satisfied by her support. ‘Very good, my dear,’ he chuckled. ‘Now let us put it to the test. Test Number Two, as you might call it.’

He collected the batch of formal documents, slipped them into a large envelope, and got up.

‘Lucky you had all that equipment with you,’ she said.

But he didn’t seem to notice the touch of sarcasm.

‘Here we go,’ he said. ‘And if at first we don’t succeed we will certainly try again. Too much hangs on this, Dodo, to be fobbed off at any stage.’

## 2

## The Super-Computer

But to her surprise they were not fobbed off.

The documents presented at the reception area met with a rapid response.

‘Please come up, sir. And the young lady. Professor Brett will be delighted to meet you.’

The Doctor was concerned that his plan had worked so easily. Surely there should be far tighter security. No wonder things might be going wrong.

But he need not have worried.

They were met by a sharp-eyed man, who politely syphoned them off into a side office while their papers were checked and telephone calls were made in the room adjacent to them.

‘What’s the excitement?’ whispered Dodo.

‘Very right and proper,’ the Doctor nodded with approval. ‘You can’t have any old person just drop in here

– to the nerve centre, so to speak...’

‘But you’re not any old person,’ she protested.

‘Thank you. But in the eyes of these gentlemen I am not to be accepted at face value. All personnel should be checked. Particularly in this office.’

‘Why in this office?’

‘Because, my dear, because of what I think they have been up to.’

The sharp-eyed man rejoined them. ‘I am Major Green.

Professor Brett will be free in just one moment.’

A light flashed above the door. ‘There he is now.’

They were ushered into a very impressive room: part office, part laboratory. Equipment lined one side of the room; files were packed along a second wall. The third wall was a window that looked out over the city. But it was the fourth wall that fascinated the Doctor. It was entirely given over to what he realised was an immense computer, quietly ticking away in the background. Doing its sums, the

Doctor thought to himself.

For such a large piece of equipment it was remarkably silent; the subdued hum of dynamos had an almost soporific effect that belied the power the Doctor guessed lay below the functional outline. He wondered what material had been used to build it. Some sort of intensely durable plastic, he supposed.

It acted as a framework for an amazing battery of dials and lights, and there was a fascinating rhythm about the way it functioned. It could almost be breathing. The thought gave the Doctor a slight start. The overall structure did resemble a human shape. A squat box-like head topped a powerful body, and from a certain angle its panels took on the outline of a gigantic human.

The man behind the desk rose to greet them.

'Professor Brett,' the Major introduced them, and then withdrew.

Professor Brett shook hands warmly. He was plump, middle-aged, with a broad smile.

'Come in. Sit down. Most pleased to meet you. I am sure I know who you are. I've heard Ian Chesterton speak of you often. At least, I suppose you are the Doctor he used to quote. As I remember it, a great expert in computers, he used to say.'

The Doctor shook his head in protest.

'Yes. I remember now.' Brett nodded happily. 'He has a whole appendix to one of his publications. Your analyses of a very complex problem.' He began to rummage in his desk. 'I thought so... There... Do you recognise that?' He snapped open a sheaf of papers...

The Doctor let his eye flick through the mass of equations on the desk before him.

'Ah yes,' he said. 'Quite so... Not that I would come to quite the same conclusions if I were to do the work again today.'

'No?' Brett looked startled.

'No,' said the Doctor thoughtfully. 'I would be more inclined to favour introducing an unknown factor.'

'An unknown factor?' Brett blinked at him.

‘The parts may very well generate something more than their components. I am now favouring an element which I think of as a fusion... The unknown factor created by the known... A random development.’

Brett watched him scribbling on a scrap of paper on the desk. The Doctor pushed it across to him. The mathematics were almost beyond him, but he immediately saw the principle at work.

‘Amazing! I must follow this up. As a matter of fact...’

‘Perhaps later,’ said the Doctor. He had his own reasons why he did not want to continue the matter at that moment. After all, he had been concerned only to supply his credentials, and that had been clearly achieved. He indicated the computer against the wall.

‘As you may have guessed, Professor,’ he said, ‘I have had some information about your work.’

‘It is on the Very Secret List, Doctor.’

‘And that is where it ought to stay,’ said the Doctor firmly.

The Professor looked at him sharply. ‘Indeed?’

‘Think what would happen if it got into the wrong hands,’ said the Doctor. ‘Or if in any way it were not controlled in the way you have designed it.’

‘No likelihood of that,’ Brett smiled. ‘It has been my life’s work. I am not likely to pass it across to anyone else.’

The Doctor gazed at the throbbing bank of computers.

‘I had a strange feeling as I arrived,’ he said. ‘I was aware of a vast source of energy.’

The Professor looked proudly at the banks of instruments. ‘I think I may safely say it is years ahead of its time.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘You can certainly say that,’ he agreed.

The two men might have stood there for some time looking with admiration – or apprehension – but Dodo piped up: ‘What makes it so special then?’

The Professor looked startled. ‘My – er – my secretary,’

explained the Doctor. ‘Dodo Chaplet.’

The Professor took a deep breath. ‘Well, Miss Chaplet.

Admittedly this is not the biggest computer in the world, but it is the most sophisticated. Power and complexity count. This machine is about to be linked with a world-wide network of simpler computers. An international bank. A Central Intelligence with immense capacity.’

‘But to do what?’ persisted Dodo.

The Professor hesitated... then he said. ‘To think, Miss Chaplet. That’s what it will be able to do. Think.’

‘For example?’ Steven had once said that Dodo could be like a dog with a bone. The Doctor was inclined to agree on this point.

‘For example,’ said the Professor. ‘Suppose an air-craft were flying over the middle of some ocean when it develops a fault – in the electrical system, or the controls.

The fault must be attended to immediately or lives will be at risk. After the link-up, the instruments on the aircraft will be able to feed back the necessary data through the network and in a split-second the problem will be received in this machine – and instantaneously the solution is given

– then the fault corrected. Or, again, suppose a doctor in a remote country needs details for diagnosis, or the latest in treatments, the same network is put to use and the data given.’

Dodo looked a little dazed as she gazed at the machine.

‘I see... At least, I think I see.’

The Professor smiled. ‘Perhaps it will become clearer tonight.’

‘What happens tonight?’ asked the Doctor.

‘The Press Conference,’ said Brett. ‘Doesn’t that tie in with your visit? I thought that might be the reason you are here.’

‘Of course,’ nodded the Doctor. ‘I leave all these details to Dodo... Yes, my dear fellow, I shall be there.’

Brett nodded. He pressed a buzzer.

The door opened and a girl hurried in.

‘And this is my secretary, Polly,’ said Brett.

She was an attractive girl with long blonde hair and blue eyes. Dodo decided they were about the same age – not that Dodo was too sure what her own age was nowadays.

Polly wore the type of clothes Dodo had just seen in the streets – a very short skirt which displayed her long and shapely legs.

‘Now let me tell you one thing,’ went on Brett.

‘Although Polly is an excellent typist – amongst other things – she is second-best to Wotan.’

‘Wotan?’ Dodo was puzzled.

Brett waved a hand towards the computer. ‘I call it Wotan... Will Operating Thought Analogue... See?’

Dodo wasn’t sure that she did see, but the Doctor nodded.

‘Wotan not only types faster than Polly, operates faster, files faster, et cetera, et cetera, but he also thinks faster than Polly, thinks faster than I do, and is much more accurate than both.’

‘Is that true?’ Dodo turned to the other girl.

‘’Fraid so,’ grinned Polly. ‘And what’s more, Wotan never makes a mistake... wretched thing!’ She pulled a face at the machine.

It went on purring softly in the background, lights flickering rhythmically.

‘Surely you’re not claiming to have invented a machine that thinks for itself?’ said the Doctor.

Brett hesitated, then nodded. ‘That is the case.’

‘And never makes a mistake?’ The Doctor was sceptical.

‘Never,’ said Brett.

‘Do you mind if I put this to the test?’ The Doctor stood before the machine. ‘It accepts audio instructions, I suppose?’

‘Of course,’ said Brett.

‘And this is the microphone?’ He indicated the instrument.

Brett nodded. ‘That takes over the function of the hearing system. There is a system of pulses – transmissions

_’

‘Naturally...’ The Doctor needed no explanation. He spoke directly to the machine. ‘What is the square root of 17422?’

A slip of paper appeared in the slot by the Doctor’s hand. He glanced at it.

‘Correct?’ smiled Brett.

‘One moment.’ That was in fact all the Doctor needed for his own calculation He looked at the machine with approval. ‘Very good,’ he said.

Dodo took the Doctor’s place. ‘That was too easy,’ she said. ‘Let me try.’

‘Certainly,’ said Brett.

She gave the machine an amused smile. ‘Answer this, you comic-looking contraption... What does the word

"TARDIS" mean?’

The slip appeared as before, without the slightest pause.

Dodo looked up at the Doctor. ‘That’s scary,’ she told him.

‘What does it say, child?’

She read out: ‘TARDIS stands for Time And Relative Dimensions In Space.’

The Doctor took the slip from her. ‘How could it have known this?’

Brett was delighted. ‘Wotan has his own methods... and his own secrets.’ He turned to Dodo, who was standing as though transfixed in front of the machine... ‘And now, Miss Chaplet...’ She didn’t react. ‘Miss Chaplet...!’

The Doctor took her arm. ‘Are you all right?’ he asked.

‘Oh... what? Sorry... Yes, I’m all right... just a funny sound... A buzzing in my head.’ She didn’t look too steady.

‘Sit down, love,’ said Polly. She took Dodo to a chair.

Dodo sat for a moment as the noise faded. She managed a faint smile.

‘Feeling better?’ asked Polly.

‘Much better. Thanks.’ She was glad the other girl was there.

The Doctor had already turned back to inspect the machine. Brett joined him.

‘You look as though you could do with a bit of time off,’

said Polly. ‘Been working too hard.’

‘I’m fine,’ Dodo assured her.

‘This your first time in London?’ asked Polly.

‘Oh no... but it must have been some time ago... I’m not quite sure when.. So I’m out of touch.’

‘Then leave it to me,’ said Polly. ‘I’ll fix a break for both of us, and I know the best spots in town.’

‘I’d like that.’ Dodo felt her energy flood back. ‘In fact I could do with a night out.’

‘I know the very place. Run by a girl I know. "The Inferno". That’s a date for tonight.’

‘I’ll have to check with the Doctor.’

‘He’ll agree.’ Polly was confident.

The Doctor must have overheard, for he said, ‘You won’t be interested in the conference this evening, Dodo.

Why don’t you take time off?’

‘Told you!’ said Polly.

‘I may have to see you later,’ added the Doctor. ‘Where shall I collect

you?'

'It's called "The Inferno",' Dodo told him.

'In Long Acre,' added Polly. 'A new discothèque. You can't miss it.'

The Doctor nodded, but it seemed that he was already totally absorbed with Wotan, as though there were only this complex and powerful piece of machinery and himself in the world.

## 3

## A Night Out

'The Inferno' certainly lived up to its name. Beat music throbbed throughout the cave-like disco. The roof and walls were decorated with devils dancing round flames in the spinning lights. It had been formed out of two old wine-cellars. The floor of one was packed with dancers; the other had been turned into a bar.

The person in charge was another girl, not out of her teens; mini-skirted, cheerful and very confident. Dodo was amazed how youth was running its own things in these swinging sixties.

'There's Kitty!' Polly led the way across the crowded dance floor.

'Hello, Polly! Am I glad to see you,' said the girl behind the bar.

'Dodo... Kitty. Kitty... Dodo.' Polly introduced them above the noise of the music.

'Hi!'

'Hi!' That seemed to be the greeting of the day.

'Just the person I need,' went on Kitty. 'I'm on my own... Need help... How about a hand?'

'Here we go,' said Polly. 'Behind the bar again, is it?'

'That too,' said Kitty. 'But a little Good Samaritan work first.'

'Like what?'

'Remember the sailor at the weekend?'

'Propping up the bar?'

‘Right.’

‘Not especially.’

‘Well, he’s here again And it’s giving the place a bad name.’

‘Not behaving?’

‘Behaving all right. But he’s so miserable he’s putting a damper on the place.’

‘What can I do about it?’

‘If you set your mind to it..

‘Okay. Flattery will get you anywhere.’

‘There he is, at the end of the bar. He just sits and mopes.’

‘So I see. No great advertisement for the place, is he?’

They could see through the crowd a naval rating, sitting on a high stool at the end of the bar, looking balefully at nothing.

‘He really has a problem,’ Polly agreed. ‘I might need your help, Dodo. Stick with me.’

Dodo followed her. Polly looked as though she were going to walk past the young man, but she stopped suddenly.

‘Well, hello!’ she said in surprise. ‘Didn’t we meet a couple of days ago?’

He gradually focused on her. A tiny flicker of interest managed to creep into his eyes.

‘I think we did.’

‘You think?’ Polly appeared to be indignant. ‘You think we met! I must have made a real impression!’

‘Sorry. I didn’t mean that.’

‘Sorry! He says he’s sorry!’ Polly gestured to Dodo in disgust. ‘And as I remember it you were just as cheerful last time.’

‘No law against that, is there?’ said the sailor.

‘Not if you’ve nothing better to do… And with that face.

Look… I’ll show you.’

She climbed onto the next stool and imitated the sailor’s glum expression.

‘Bad as that?’ he asked as he watched her.

‘Worse,’ she told him. ‘What’s the problem?’

‘You wouldn’t understand.’

‘Try me.’

‘You’d think I’m some kind of nut.’

‘You probably are. But press on regardless.’

‘Well… It’s my ship… and my mates… They’ve gone off to the West Indies, and I’ve got a shore posting… for the next six months.’

‘I see. So you’re missing all that South Sea Island stuff.

Waving palms, blue skies, warm seas, white beaches.

You’re stuck here in barracks?’

‘If you’ve finished cheering me up…’

‘Come on, Dodo. I can’t stand someone who’s sorry for himself… and can’t take a joke.’

She started to move away, but her way was barred by a tall young man with long hair and a smug expression.

‘Try me, darling,’ he said confidently. ‘I’ve got a great sense of humour.’

‘You’d have to have,’ agreed Polly. ‘And get your arm out of the way.’

‘You don’t mean it.’

‘It might surprise you…’ began Polly.

‘Flash is the name.’

‘It might surprise you, Flash, but I find you tedious.’

‘Promise you, darling, you’ll have a better time with me than with Shorty here –’ He jerked his thumb at the sailor.

‘So let’s give it a go.’

He grabbed her arm and moved towards the dancers.

Polly pulled away.

The sailor slipped off the high stool. ‘On your way, mate,’ he said.

‘Go and play toy boats,’ said Flash unpleasantly. ‘Push off, half-pint.’

The sailor moved so fast that Flash didn’t have a chance. He was in a grip that had him helpless.

‘Lay off! You’ll break my back!’

‘Time you went home,’ said the sailor quietly. He let the other man go. Flash spun round on him, but the sailor was ready, karate-style.

‘I said, go home.’

For a couple of seconds Flash thought about snatching up a handy bottle, but he changed his mind. ‘You’ve put my back out,’ he grimaced. ‘I’ll sue you for that.’

‘You do that,’ said the sailor.

As Flash made for the exit, Polly said, ‘Thanks. I owe you for that, sailor... Or do you have a name?’

He let his face crack into a smile. ‘Ben,’ he said. ‘Ben Jackson.’

From where she stood Kitty watched the two of them move onto the dance floor.

‘Nice going,’ she said under her breath.

The Doctor viewed with approval the way they had prepared the press conference at the Royal Scientific Club.

Even the journalists appeared to make sense of the exhibits. The development of Computers was displayed and documented, with explanations, photographs and designs.

The main exhibit – and the one that drew the biggest crowd – was a

life-size model of Wotan. The Doctor had almost begun to view him as an old friend. Well, perhaps

'friend' was the wrong word. Wotan would have to reveal not only his intelligence– and the Doctor needed no further evidence about that – but would also have to prove it had something like a heart. The Doctor was surprised to find himself thinking in these terms, for after all, a computer does not have a heart! It is not a sentient being.

It has no ethics, no morality – no conscience. It is only the sum total of its parts, plus the knowledge which has been fed into it. It cannot be wiser or cleverer than the brains that created it... Or could it? That was the question the Doctor now asked himself. And he hoped at this juncture to get some idea of the answer.

But very little had come out of the conference that the Doctor did not already know. A panel of officials and scientists sat on a platform answering questions from the floor. Lapel badges indicated the committee members, led by their Chairman Sir Charles Summer. Beside him sat Professor Krimpton. It was indeed a high-level panel that had been put together, though on the other side of Sir Charles, the Doctor noted an empty chair.

'You've heard the back-room boys,' announced Sir Charles. 'I just want to remind you that C-Day – Computer Day – is next Monday, three days' time. Then all sophisticated communication systems in this country, and in many other parts of the world, will be linked with this central control we call Wotan, and will in fact be subservient to it. Professor Krimpton has told you of its peaceful and military capacity. I need hardly point out what an enormous step forward this is for Britain and, I think I may say, for the rest of the world.'

There was a sea of waving papers from the floor.

'Doesn't this put a lot of power into the hands of whoever operates Wotan?' The journalists were already writing the headline... 'Bureaucrats, the new Dictators'.

'No one operates Wotan,' protested Sir Charles. 'He operates himself. A computer is merely a mechanism which thinks logically, solving a problem without any political or private end. A disinterested intelligence, making calculations, providing truthful answers, structured by mathematical laws. It has no imaginative powers.'

'No way of supplying false answers?' came the question from the floor.

‘Not if it has been correctly programmed. And that is certainly the case with Wotan. Don’t forget, such a mechanism is merely our servant.’

‘And this "thinking" that you say it does... Is the process similar to the way we think?’

‘When we think logically and without emotion, then yes. That is how Wotan functions, but in his case with fantastic speed and accuracy, able to handle hundreds of problems at once, without mistakes.’

‘How about if it gets so smart it decides to get along without people?’

There was a burst of laughter, and the question was the signal for the break-up of the meeting.

Sir Charles indicated the empty chair beside him. ‘I expected Professor Brett to have been here by now. He should have answered most of these questions.’

Krimpton leant across. ‘You know what he’s like, Sir Charles. He gets so involved with his work...’

‘All very well. But this is really his show.’ He turned to the audience. ‘Bear with us, gentlemen. Professor Brett will be along in a moment or two.’

At the back of the room the Doctor frowned. So Brett was supposed to be there? He wondered uneasily what had happened to him. He moved away, and found himself staring at the model of Wotan.

Brett first had telephone calls which delayed him, and now that he was ready to go, he knew something was wrong.

The security graph that recorded entry to this restricted part of the Tower was inaccurate. A series of small breaks appeared, as though the mechanism had developed a hiccup. Or perhaps an irregular entry had been made, the graph had started to record it, and then it had been overridden. For that to happen once was unusual, but this appeared to have taken place about a dozen times in the last hour. Security had been about to move into the alert sector, and each time it had been prevented. Could someone have been interfering with the alarm signal? Was there someone in the Restricted area? He felt suddenly apprehensive, looking round the room nervously. There was only the familiar sight of Wotan ticking quietly, flickering lights... nothing out of place. And yet the Professor was overcome by a strange

uneasiness.

He was late for the conference, but he couldn't leave with these doubts in his mind. He disliked calling in Major Green unnecessarily, but this was an emergency.

The Major answered the buzzer immediately.

'Still here, Professor? I thought you had to go to this conference?'

'Have you been on duty yourself?' asked Brett.

'Why, yes.' The Major was surprised.

'Our usual Security screens are in operation?'

'Of course.'

'So you would know if... well, if there had been an intruder?'

The Professor was so unlike his normally bland and relaxed self that the Major looked at him sharply.

'There's been a complete security screen on the Restricted Section. It functions night and day. Why? Have you any reason to suspect anything?'

'The Recorder Graph has developed a fault.' Brett indicated the print. 'One can't be too careful.'

'Of course not.'

'Besides..' Brett hesitated. He wasn't a man to give way to irrational fears. 'I've had an odd feeling this last hour or so. As if I were being watched. As though a stranger were somewhere around.'

'I can assure you,' said the Major, 'you and I are the only people in this part of the Tower. The rest of the staff are attending the conference.'

'I must go.' Brett started to cram papers into his briefcase. 'Sorry, Major. I think I've been overdoing things lately. Next week I intend to start a long holiday.'

'Good night, sir.' The Major went back to his office. He had suggested several weeks ago that Professor Brett took a holiday. The man had worked himself into the ground perfecting that confounded computer

of his!

Brett suddenly stopped packing his case. None of these papers were relevant. He was behaving in an extraordinary fashion. He knew it... But why? He couldn't help it. He was suddenly so nervous... Unable to get out of the room...

Unable to leave for the conference.

'This is ridiculous,' he said aloud. He made a determined effort. He was sane and rational, he told himself. One did not entertain or tolerate fantasies. Yet the ideas which kept flooding into his mind... breaking into his thoughts – taking over his thinking in fact – were fantasies. And he would not permit it. He *had* been working too hard lately. Too long. He was exhausted. That was it. That was the cause of these extraordinary impulses that burst through, rather like pulses of electrical currents.

He could handle it. He would leave now and go to the conference...

But the ticking of the machine against the wall seemed to grow louder. The lights leapt, and blazed more vividly.

He was being mesmerised, he decided. It was some sort of trance. An hallucination. He was Professor Brett... He was the inventor... The creator... He was the Master... in charge... No man becomes the servant of his own creation.

He was fighting hard to hold onto his sanity. To retain dignity, strength. To retain his own integrity...

But he knew it was a losing battle. And one small part of his brain was strangely proud that he had made such a powerful instrument he himself could not stand up to it.

What a triumph! Even though he should suffer or be destroyed – and by his own invention! What a triumph!

He tried to open the door and get out, but it was useless.

He couldn't move. He could not escape. Finally he was forced to turn and stare at the machine, to move towards it... as though programmed himself, unable to break the pattern.

He was in a trance as he stood before Wotan. 'What do you want of me?' he asked.

**Servant turned Master**

Gradually Dodo realised that she was not enjoying herself.

She couldn't think why, for she had been dancing, and chatting to the others. She was at the table when Polly and Ben came off the floor.

'Things look a little brighter now, do they, sailor?'

laughed Kitty.

'Who wants to go to the West Indies anyhow!' agreed Ben.

Kitty shook her head at Polly. 'I don't know how you do it,' she said.

'Just a knack, love,' grinned Polly.

'You can have a job here any time,' Kitty told her.

'I like the one I've got,' said Polly.

Dodo listened to the cheerful talk around her, but it didn't seem real. What should have been a party was being spoilt by something she couldn't put her finger on.

'You all right, love?' Polly was quick to notice the other girl's silence.

'I've got a headache,' said Dodo.

'It's this noise,' agreed Ben. 'That disco beat could bust your eardrums.'

'It's a sort of humming noise,' explained Dodo. 'It's been coming and going since I was in your office... There!

It's stopped again, I'll be all right.' She smiled.

'Great,' said Ben. 'Okay, Polly. On your feet.'

'Here we go again,' sighed Polly as she let Ben lead her back amongst the dancers.

Dodo waited until they were lost in the crowd, then she put her fingers to her ears. The noise of humming, like the sound of a dynamo, blotted out everything. She couldn't understand how no one

else heard it. It was so real, so insistent... She was hardly able to think. The room, the music, the dancers – everything receded. The noise and laughter seemed to die away. She wondered whether the lights were really growing dimmer...

She had to get away from this place...

She wondered what was happening to her.

Sir Charles had decided to close the conference.

'Sorry, gentlemen. I'm afraid Professor Brett isn't going to make it. Something important must have turned up.

We'll issue a statement...'

He broke off as Brett hurried into the room, pushing past the Doctor without appearing to recognise him. The Doctor noted the strained expression on his face, and the fact that Brett was wearing a raincoat and gloves.

'Sorry I couldn't attend,' called out Brett. His voice sounded different to the Doctor – impersonal, detached, as though he were reading a speech.

'It was... unavoidable,' went on Brett. 'Apologies.'

'Now you're here,' said Sir Charles, 'you might like to tell our guests something about –'

Brett interrupted curtly. 'I'm afraid I've no time. I must speak to Professor Krimpton.'

Sir Charles was indignant. 'The Press have come here on our invitation –'

'This is urgent.' Brett brushed him aside. 'Where is...

ah, there you are, Krimpton.'

'You wish to see me?' Krimpton was taken aback.

'Please come with me,' said Brett.

'I'm from the *New York Daily Sketch*...' called out someone from the floor.

‘No comment,’ said Brett. He took Krimpton by the arm.

‘You haven’t heard the question,’ shouted the journalist.

‘I can tell you nothing,’ said Brett. He was leading Krimpton from the room.

The Doctor noted the glazed look in Brett’s eyes. This was not the same man he had met that morning. The warmth had gone... He seemed to be driven along by some internal force.

‘ *Deus ex machina*,’ whispered the Doctor to himself. ‘In one sense or another.’

He watched the two men leave the room, then made his way through the crowd of journalists – now with a ‘human story’ – more interesting than technicalities about computers - and joined Sir Charles.

‘Tell me, Sir Charles,’ he said, ‘who exactly is Krimpton? What is his contribution to the work?’

‘Electronics,’ said Sir Charles sharply. ‘One of our top men. Still, there can’t be any excuse... Damn bad manners.

Wonder if something’s gone wrong with the project. Must be serious before Brett would... I’d better check.’

Sir Charles hurried away.

The Doctor was thoughtful. The possibilities of what might have happened were many and various... But they were all too fantastic for the Doctor to accept.

Major Green had been suspicious ever since Brett had left his office. He had no idea what was wrong, but something very strange had taken place, and it was his job to make sure that the Restricted Area remained secure.

He patrolled the corridors outside the main office, double-checking every half-hour. He tried doors, tested locks, but there was nothing unusual. And yet some of Brett’s nervousness seemed to have rubbed off on him, and the Major found he was imagining things – sounds, movements, a strange atmosphere.

He stopped for the tenth time outside the door to Brett’s room. Was it his imagination? Or was the sound of the computer’s constant ticking

louder? It sounded erratic. He listened, catching his breath... It was certainly different.

He hesitated before unlocking the door. Even as he opened it, he heard the sudden abrupt and irregular tone of the machine. It had never sounded like that before.

He went in and was shaken to see two vivid lights shining directly at him. The glare was blinding. He tried to shield his eyes.

He should have backed out, he told himself. But he was dazed by the beams. He experienced a strange helplessness, as though hypnotised, with no will of his own.

He closed the door and moved towards Wotan. There was no doubt; the machine was louder, stronger. Lights blazed, and there was an air of power and assurance about it as it dominated the room.

The Major moved to the front of the machine, and stood passively for a few seconds before putting both hands into the slot that delivered the printed messages.

His face was contorted with pain for a second, then he withdrew his hands. The bones were showing through the skin, giving a skeletal effect, as though a light were shining through the flesh. The Major put the tips of his fingers together.

He looked dumbly at the machine. ‘I understand,’ he said in reply.

He took a pair of gloves from his pocket and pulled them on. Then he crossed to the desk and began to dial a number.

‘It’s for you, Dodo,’ called Kitty above the noise.

‘Telephone. Corner of the bar.’

Dodo wondered who would know to call her there.

Perhaps, the Doctor.

‘Hello... Yes... Who is that?’

‘Hold the line one moment,’ said the Major. He plugged the extension into the computer. Dodo’s voice could be heard through the machine. ‘Speak up. There’s so much noise.’

The reaction was immediate. Wotan went into action –

lights leaping into life, a battery of signals seeming to race from within.

At the other end of the line Dodo listened impassively.

Then she said, 'Yes... I understand.'

She put down the receiver, and turned towards the exit.

No one noticed as she went – quietly, subdued, oblivious of her surroundings.

Brett led the way hurriedly and Krimpton was hustled along in his wake. He had never seen his old friend in such a state. Not at all like himself. Nevertheless it was an extraordinary way to behave!

'I must say it's very odd, Brett, to break up the meeting like that.'

'I had no choice.'

'What do you mean by that?' They were striding through the Restricted Area towards Brett's office.

'You will soon understand.' He didn't offer any further explanation.

'This is a bit much,' protested Krimpton. 'It's late and I can spare only a couple of minutes...'

'Nothing is too much,' said Brett coldly.

Krimpton supposed that the worst must have happened.

'Has the computer system broken down?'

'On the contrary,' said Brett, 'it is *we* who have broken down. It is we who have failed.'

The man didn't make sense. 'We've failed?' They reached the outer office. 'In what way?'

'Humanity has come to a standstill intellectually. We are unable to develop our Earth properly. Progress is beyond us.'

'For heaven's sake, Brett. This is nonsense!'

Brett was unlocking his office door, but he halted to look severely at his friend. 'Be careful what you say, Krimpton. This is the conclusion

reached by Wotan.' He opened the door and ushered the other man in.

'Are you joking? Do you mean to tell me that this machine...'

'It's no joke,' cut in Brett. 'Wotan has decided the world cannot continue the way mankind is running it.'

He looked at Krimpton as though he were stating a Truth handed down from the heavens. It was comic!

Krimpton began to laugh. The Professor was taking his invention too seriously.

'And what does Wotan propose to do about it?' he asked. 'Take over the job from us?'

'Correct.' There was no flicker of a smile on Brett's face.

He was cold and aloof as Krimpton had never seen him before. 'From now on we are to serve.'

'And what if mankind doesn't co-operate? What happens? We all get obliterated?'

'If necessary.'

The man was to unlike himself, so alien, that Krimpton was alarmed. 'You've gone off your rocker, old fellow,' he said, and backed cautiously towards the door.

'You can't get away,' said Brett.

'You've been working too hard, my friend,' said Krimpton. He threw open the door. The Major was standing just outside.

'Thank goodness you're here, Major. He's off his head...

right round the bend!'

The Major shook his head. 'He's not mad, Professor Krimpton.' There was the same impersonal look in the Major's eyes, the same lack of emotion.

Krimpton tried to push past. 'Let me out!'

He was no match for the Major as he was forced back into the room. 'I refuse to be treated like this!' he shouted.

‘I won’t stay...’ He saw the phone on the desk and snatched it up.

‘Put that down,’ ordered the Major.

Krimpton was shaking so much that he couldn’t use the dial.

‘Let me go!’

The Major closed the door and came towards him.

‘Keep away,’ pleaded Krimpton. ‘Just leave me alone...

Let me...’ The strength had gone out of him, and his voice trailed away. He became aware of two powerful beams of light playing over him.

The computer had been silent, but now gradually came to life. The sound of its electronic pulses quickkened.

Krimpton gazed at it with alarm. ‘It’s not possible,’ he whispered. ‘Not possible... not possible...’

He tried to cover his eyes, but there was no protection from the light.

He made a last protest, calling out: ‘I don’t believe it! I won’t serve you... I am not a machine... I am a person... A human being! The most important thing is human life. It doesn’t matter if we are not as efficient as you are.

Machines are not masters... We made you for our purposes...’ His voice cracked. He stopped for a few seconds, then moved trance-like to stand before Wotan.

‘What do you want?’ he asked in a flat, impersonal voice.

It was shortly before the Doctor arrived to collect Dodo from ‘The Inferno’ Club that Polly discovered that the girl was missing. She, Kitty and Ben searched the cellars, but there was no sign of her.

‘Surely she wouldn’t just leave without a word,’ said Polly. ‘I’m worried. I’m supposed to be looking after her.’

The Doctor made an impressive contrast with the rest of those who still packed the floors as he arrived.

‘There you are!’ he greeted them. ‘I imagine you and Dodo have enjoyed yourselves – if the amount of noise is anything to go by.’

‘We can’t find Dodo,’ Polly told him. ‘We think she must have gone.’

The Doctor frowned. ‘But where could she go? She doesn’t know anyone here nowadays.’

‘She had a phone call... about half an hour ago. We haven’t seen her since.’

‘Who was the call from?’

No one knew.

‘And who is this young man?’ He indicated the young sailor.

‘The name’s Ben. He’s been helping to look for Dodo.’

‘Very well,’ said the Doctor. ‘We’ll have another quick search. After all, she might still be somewhere in this crowd.’

There was no longer any discord in the office. The three men were united in a common purpose.

‘We are here to serve Wotan,’ said Brett. ‘On his instructions new machines must be constructed. The best and finest human brains must be conscripted to accomplish this task. It is top priority. We must design the new models to supersede human life, then they in turn will take over the march of progress, and they will design a further generation. We are all servants to this cause. It is the purpose of our existence.’

The other two men nodded. They understood and approved.

‘We must plan this campaign under the instructions of Wotan,’ went on Brett. ‘We are fortunate to be enlisted at the very start of this historic undertaking. Once we have collected the team that Wotan demands we will launch the next step in the operations.’ There was a moment’s silence before he continued. ‘I speak for Wotan and, Major, you are in charge of planning.’

He handed a slip of instructions to Krimpton. ‘You are to supervise the electronic design and construction of the new machines.’ There was total acceptance and dedication from all.

‘We failed in one important aspect when Wotan was designed,’ added Brett. ‘The new machines are to be mobile, able to move freely, and each is to have an independent, self-generating, source of power.’

Krimpton read out his fresh instruction. ‘They must all carry their own weapons.’

There was a rapid outburst of signals from Wotan. It was possible to feel the frustration within the machine at having to be dependent on three such fallible human beings.

‘All control is to be centralised in this office,’ said the Major.

There was a pause, then Brett announced, ‘The first step to be taken is to complete the planning team. For that Wotan demands one *special* brain. We are instructed to make sure he is brought here with great urgency. In three days’ time a switch-on which links up a network of computers will take place. That is our deadline.’

‘What is this special brain?’ asked Krimpton.

‘It is forbidden to ask questions,’ said Brett.

‘We obey orders,’ said the Major.

‘The task of enlisting the special brain is already under way,’ Brett told them. ‘To lure him here we have had to provide ourselves with bait.’

The Major lifted a warning hand. ‘Someone is coming.’

Brett was not concerned. ‘It is the fourth member of our planning staff. Summoned to receive instructions.’

They didn’t know whom to expect as the door opened, but they were startled to see a girl walk in.

‘The Doctor’s secretary!’ said Brett.

Dodo didn’t appear to notice the three men. She walked towards Wotan and stood directly before the machine.

‘What are my instructions?’ asked Dodo.

The computer reacted explosively. Noise and lights reached an alarming pitch... but there was no electronic message, no slip of paper with instructions followed.

Instead there was a sudden silence, then a strange metallic sound. The voice that came from the machine was synthetic, and high-pitched – totally impersonal.

‘You... are to... bring the Doctor... here... The Doctor...

is required... You understand?’

Dodo made no reply. She turned and left the room as she had entered, oblivious of everything else around her.

## 5

## Putting the Team Together

The two powerful lights that shone from Wotan dominated the office, and they now appeared more than ever like eyes.

To the three men the machine took on more and more the essence of some great controller, an almost god-like figure.

Neither Brett nor Krimpton had any sense of having created this monster; they knew they were its creatures, cogs in its mechanism – there merely to perform a function, without thoughts of their own, without personality, without humanity, in fact. The reversal of roles was complete. As for Major Green, he had transferred his loyalty from one set of masters to another. What he had done for Security he would now do for Wotan – with one difference. He was totally dedicated to this new master.

There would be no qualifications; he was ready to die in its service.

Each man understood the part he had to play in Wotan’s scheme of things. Brett was its mouthpiece. The energy used by the machine’s effort to speak was enormous. Even as it intoned in its metallic fashion, ‘Instructions must be given,’ dynamos reached a pitch that shook the room. Brett took over – the words merely being transmitted through him.

He turned to the other two. ‘These are your orders, and time is short. Progress is not possible unless Wotan is in control over the next few days. After that, Wotan will make known the future of our race: who shall live and serve, and who shall be obliterated.’

There was no protest. The statement seemed logical and inevitable.

As Brett spoke a message-slip rattled from the teleprinter. He handed it to Krimpton. ‘Read it.’

Krimpton nodded. ‘London is the first capital to be taken over,’ he

read out. ‘Then Washington, Moscow, Paris and Tokyo. In order to accomplish this the War Machines must go into production immediately.’

No one questioned what they might be. The knowledge was already implanted in their intelligence.

‘For this,’ said Brett, ‘we require highly skilled labour as well as manual workers. A first priority is to create this force. It is to start work now.’

It was as though the machine was clarifying to itself the necessary steps to be taken. The teleprinter burst into life.

Brett read out the message: ‘Contact is to be made by telephone with these people. When they answer and contact is made, the switch is to be made through to Thought Control. In this way, Wotan will enlist each individual. Once the switch is made they will be unable to resist.’

Again that seemed obvious to the others.

‘And when we have made this contact,’ said the Major,

‘where are we to construct these machines?’

‘That is your function,’ Brett told him. ‘You are to find suitable places in Central London – warehouses, factories and the like. You must be careful not to arouse suspicion, for we are vulnerable only for these first few days. After that nothing will be able to oppose us.’

There was no sense of betrayal in their voices as they planned the destruction of their own kind: indeed, there was no judgement or morality in their strategy. The overwhelming of humanity was being planned as carefully and mathematically as any other scientific project, and with as little morality. The tasks of the intellect had to be carried out, regardless of the outcome to the world at large.

Other men would have to pick up the pieces – that is, if there were any other men left to do it.

Major Green acknowledged his instructions, turned and left the office.

Brett faced Krimpton, looking blankly at him as he issued his instructions. ‘You are to complete your work on the electrical programme. It is to be devised for the new generation of computers that the War Machines require. It is important they are able to move

freely of their own accord and at their own will. They will contain their own power. And finally, all the systems as devised must be integrated through the system already controlled by Wotan.'

None of this seemed to dismay Krimpton. 'I shall begin at once,' he said.

But Brett stopped him. 'No,' he said, 'there is one priority which is even higher, and you are required to assist with that. Top priority is to enlist the Doctor. It is his intellect that Wotan most requires. It was on his arrival here that this development became possible, and has been brought forward. He is our quarry. Before all else. We must make sure of hint tonight.'

Krimpton seemed to hesitate for the first time. Perhaps he failed to see how the next stop could be fulfilled in that space of time.

Wotan responded instantaneously. The machine blazed with light, the office shook with its power, chained as it was to the structure around it. The voice cracked into life.

'At once!' it sounded. 'At once! The Doctor is required!'

Krimpton bowed in recognition.

Music still played in the background at 'The Inferno' Club, but the place was almost empty, only Polly and Ben remaining with the Doctor, while Kitty began to lock up the place.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I can't think what's happenend to Dodo, but I have to close the Club. If you think she'll turn up here, we can pin a message to the door.'

The Doctor nodded thoughtfully. 'Very kind,' he said. 'I shall do that.' Polly was uneasy. 'Perhaps we should go to the police.'

'I'd rather you didn't,' said Kitty. 'I've got a licence to think of.'

'Well, we have to do something.' Polly wasn't easily dissuaded. 'I'll phone the hospitals.'

'Hospitals?' Ben frowned. 'You certainly expect the worst.'

'She could have had an accident,' insisted Polly. She turned to the Doctor. 'What's her last name?'

'Chaplet,' he told her. 'Dodo Chaplet.' He was impressed by the way

this seemingly scatter-brained girl was organising things.

‘Regular little ray of sunshine, you are,’ grumbled Ben.

‘Better than just sitting on our backsides,’ called Polly as she headed for the phone.

She stopped in her tracks as Dodo breezed into the room. She greeted the Doctor brightly. ‘Hello, Doctor! So you found the place after all?’

The Doctor was so pleased to see her that he only vaguely noticed she was wearing gloves.

‘And where have you been then?’ asked Ben crossly.

‘Yes, what happened to you?’ said Polly.

Dodo looked surprised. ‘I was just round the corner.’

‘You’ve been away hours,’ protested Polly.

‘We were all worried about you, Dodo,’ said the Doctor.

‘Well, you shouldn’t have been,’ said Dodo. ‘I ran into some friends. I just stopped by with them for a chat... Was I really that long?’ She seemed to be taking it very lightly.

‘Indeed you were.’ The Doctor was puzzled. ‘You never mentioned you had friends near here.’

‘It’s a long story.’ Dodo shrugged it off. ‘Sorry you were worried, Doc.’

‘Well, Dodo, you and I have an invitation to stay the night with Sir Charles Summer and his family. It’s very late. We ought to go.’

‘I’ll find you a taxi,’ said Polly. ‘And maybe I can cadge a lift.’

‘Time I turned in.’ Ben led the way from the Club.

No one noticed the look of annoyance that passed across Dodo’s face.

Outside they said their ‘goodbyes’ as they moved towards the huge fruit and vegetable market that served London. Covent Garden at this time of night had not yet started to come to life for its early morning trading. It was silent and lay in shadow for the most part. Warehouses were locked and shuttered. Their steps echoed as they crossed the ancient square. The arches darkened the sidewalks.

Dodo looked around anxiously as Ben joined them. ‘Are you staying long in London?’ he asked the Doctor.

‘A few days at least,’ said the Doctor. ‘That is our plan, isn’t it, Dodo?’

She quickly moved in beside him. She must do nothing to arouse suspicion. ‘Yes. A few days,’ she agreed.

‘You wait here,’ said Ben. ‘I’ll fetch a taxi.’

He hurried away. Polly ran after him. ‘I know where they hang out,’ she called.

They disappeared round a corner.

‘They shouldn’t have done that,’ said Dodo.

‘Why not?’ The Doctor was surprised. ‘Very helpful couple of young people, I thought.’

Dodo forced a smile. ‘You’re right.’ She looked to see whether the Doctor noticed anything different about her.

He didn’t seem to. This was extraordinary, she thought.

For everything about her, she knew, had changed. But he was totally unaware. That was a good thing. It would make what she had to do all the easier.

She glanced down the darkened street beside them. A truck had been parked near the entrance to a warehouse.

She knew what it meant. In the shadows beside it she could make out the indistinct figures of three men. They stood motionless, looking towards her and the Doctor. As she got used to the dim light, she could see what they were wearing

– long duster-coats, like hospital attendants. One of them was holding a small case. As he moved under a street light she could make out what he took from it. It glinted in the light: a hypodermic syringe.

The men moved forwards towards them, and she deliberately turned her back on them. She didn’t need to are them close in, as she was aware of every movement. She gave a little nod, a signal – moving her head to indicate the Doctor, backing away a step or two to leave him isolated.

He was oblivious of any danger.

She was conscious that the men came within twenty yards, then they backed into the shadows.

Dodo knew what was expected of her.

‘You know, Doctor,’ she said. ‘Polly and Ben have gone off in the wrong direction. The taxi rank is the other way.’

‘Are you sure?’ he asked.

‘Positive. I’ve seen three go past.’

‘Very well,’ the Doctor agreed. ‘We mustn’t he any later.

Lead the way. I’ll follow.’

They set off down the darkened pavement.

The leader of the three men saw them turn.

‘We’ll pick up Polly on the way back,’ said Dodo casually as she walked on smartly.

‘As you say,’ the Doctor agreed. He had his doubts, but Dodo seemed to be quite sure and, after all, London was her city. They hurried on.

He stopped sharply. Someone shouted to him.

‘Doctor!’ called Ben.

A taxi pulled up beside the Doctor.

‘Here we go!’ said Ben. He and Polly jumped out. ‘We saw this one coming up, and this gentleman doesn’t need it.’

They handed a grandly-dressed little man out of the cab.

His overcoat was too long, his shoes were tied with string, his hair was matted, and all about him spoke of the streets of London – a lifetime of tramping those streets, and sleeping underneath arches.

‘It’s all yours, guv,’ said the tramp grandly. ‘Welcome to it.’ He was clutching a large parcel. Probably all his worldly possessions, thought the Doctor. ‘First time I ever took a taxi anyhow. But it was a celebration. "Case dismissed". So I stay out of jug.’ The tramp gave a

wave and set off.‘Ta-ta, then!’ he called over his shoulder.

‘Not so blooming fast, mate,’ shouted the taxi-driver.

‘What about the fare?’

‘Change a tenner?’ asked the tramp.

‘Not likely.’

‘Hold on,’ said Polly. ‘I’ve got change. I’ll fix it.’

‘Thanks, miss,’ said the driver. ‘Hop it, mate,’ he added in the tramp’s direction. Then he turned to the Doctor.

‘Right, guv. Where to?’

‘Ah. Let me see. This address.’ The Doctor showed a card to the driver, and was suddenly aware that Dodo was no longer with him.

‘Dodo... Dodo... Are you coming?’

Dodo moved back reluctantly. Chance had forestalled her. She could see the patches of shadow, unmoving, waiting further down the alleyway. There was no way of getting the Doctor to head down that path now. She climbed into the cab.

Polly followed. ‘Where are you staying, Ben?’ she asked.

‘There’s a Services Club not far off. I’ll walk.’

‘Meet me tomorrow at the main desk in the Post Office Tower,’ added Polly, ‘and I’ll stand you lunch.’

Ben looked at her cynically. ‘I’m no deb’s delight, you know.’

‘I can see that,’ said Polly drily.

‘Thanks. I’ll be there,’ Ben grinned. He called

‘Goodnight’ to the Doctor and Dodo as they drove off.

The tramp was still standing at his elbow. ‘You got a bed for the night?’ Ben asked him.

‘You might not call it a bed,’ said the tramp cautiously,

‘but it’s a blooming sight better than what I’ve been used to in my

time.'

'Oh yes?'

The tramp pointed across the wide expanse of Covent Garden, now silent and gloomy. 'See that warehouse? Got a faulty lock on the side door. I'll doss down there after I've had a spot of grub.'

Ben watched him shuffle off into the shadows. He couldn't help admiring the resilience and independence of the man, then he headed for the brighter streets of the city.

The tramp didn't notice the man in the phone box as he shambled past, nor did he hear anything that was said.

'Reporting from outside the warehouse,' said the man.

He spoke in the same impersonal voice that Brett and Krimpton had used. 'Dodo failed to deliver... Yes, she tried, but was prevented, and they've gone off in a taxi...

Yes, I understand... We will do as you say.'

The truck stood just outside the phone box. As the man came out he signalled to those waiting in the shadows.

They joined him and began to unload the truck, carrying crate after crate into the building. The work was exhausting, but they neither hesitated nor flagged. It was as though something of a mechanical character had entered their beings.

## 6

## Working for the Cause

It was only in a vague, impersonal way that Brett realised the nonstop flow of energy that seemed to be at his command. He had worked continuously for hours, planning, designing, organising, according to the instructions – silent, unspoken, but absolutely detailed and meticulous – that he knew were being transmitted to him by Wotan.

The same ceaseless activity could have been observed in those around him. They were at the top of their power –

intellects functioning as never before; all senses on the alert, aware of dangers, dealing with them, somehow knowing what his companions were planning, and slottting in as required. They were a vast,

powerful, dedicated mechanism, at work in the warehouse which Wotan had selected from a mass of data. Brett now took for granted the speed of Wotan's decisions, but it had staggered him at first. Calculations were instantaneous; the preparation was formidable. Plans were executed at speed. The only delay was the human element. No matter how hard teams of workers laboured, they were limited by their potential.

Progress would be better, Brett knew, when the machines were ready to take over, and human labour could be disposed of. Very soon, he guessed, his own usefulness would be finished. Far more effective machines would take over the planning and scientific contribution which he was doing his utmost to supply. Brett viewed the prospect without emotion. It was as things were devised. It would be proper for him to be discarded when the machines he was helping to create were ready to take control. The cause would be accomplished so much quicker, and with far more skill and intellect. He was content to serve his purpose in Wotan's world.

Brett stood in the huge warehouse and surveyed the state of things in that world. What had recently been a storage space for the market was now transformed into a highly technical workshop. All around, the contents of a nonstop supply of crates were being distributed and assembled. A collection of some of the most accomplished scientists had been assembled, and were now working with a dedication they had none of them experienced before.

Brett had kept control on all progress up to this point.

He wondered when the knowledge required would be beyond him. But at present he was able to examine the carefully prepared blue-prints, and delegate work to the teams on hand.

He moved through the Store Room. It was like going through a hive of bees, or an ant-hill. No one deviated from his function. The individual was a means to an end.

He stopped by a group around a mechanical structure.

The leading scientist joined him.

Brett indicated the prints. 'Follow in exact detail. The outer sections are being prepared elsewhere. Welding of the casing has begun.'

On the other side of the room a vast welding machine was belching forth a blaze of sparks. Team after team of welders took over the

work.

The scientist inspected the prints carefully. It was not work in which he had specialised before, but somehow he understood.

Brett moved on. It was his concern to keep the pressure going.

He stopped by the next group. ‘Electronic sections are to be assembled in this order,’ he instructed.

The group examined the new instructions, and returned silently to work.

It was some time later that night when the tramp returned to Covent Garden as he had told Ben he would do. He’d managed to eat well that evening, and he had drunk even better. He was a little unsteady as he made his way under the arcades and stopped to get his bearings. Nothing looked quite the same as it had done a few hours earlier.

But he was almost sure where he was. This was indeed the warehouse in which he had spent the previous night.

But there was something different.

‘They’ve painted out the number,’ he muttered, screwing up his eyes to concentrate.

With his usual caution when taking up residence, he moved towards the door at the side of the building, passing a parked truck at the kerbside.

He had edged the door open before he heard anything, then – what was it? A faint noise like machinery? A distant humming – the sense of hushed, intense activity? He was incredulous, and gently eased his way into the darkened corridor. The noise persisted; he was drawn towards it.

The place had been empty the night before. What was happening?

The welders wore protective masks as they worked through a shower of sparks. Shadows danced on the walls around them. From time to time a man would collapse under the strain of continuous activity, but another would take his place. They were all expendable. The ant-heap around them never relaxed. The concentration was awesome. And from where he stood – just outside the inconspicuous door at the back of the store room – the tramp was indeed overcome with awe.

He didn't know what to make of it. The transformation was so complete that he wondered whether he had come to a different place. Perhaps he had drunk even more than he had thought.

But no... he recognised the high rafters that crossed the roof. He saw stacked against the wall the crates and boxes he had seen the night before. He even recognised the piles of sacking in a corner he had used to keep warm.

This was his warehouse, all right. But what was this bizarre vision – this crackling of electronics, this hum of computers, dynamos, the shower of sparks in the corner, dancing shadows on the walls? It was a picture out of hell, and he froze on the spot. There were a couple of hundred devils at work here. But what were they doing?

A man moved through the crowd. He called out:

'Hurry! Time is short. Take over when necessary. This prototype must be completed by dawn. It is to be programmed by Wotan... Nothing must be allowed to –'

He broke off as an oscillation echoed through the room.

The sound rose and fell, grating on the ears. There was an urgency about it. The meaning was undoubted.

'Close all doors!' shouted Brett. 'Electronic locks to be activated.'

A tremor went through the work force. The rhythm was shaken – then the moment passed and work was in full flow again.

'Security on duty,' called Brett.

A number of men seemed to appear from nowhere. They looked, to the tramp, to be identical. The man called out again, 'There is an intruder amongst us.'

It was impossible for anyone to have seen him – the tramp knew that. But he was sobered with fear. He wanted to turn and run, but he couldn't move.

A small knot of men clustered round an instrument in the centre of the room. One of them was taking measurements. He called out: 'The intruder is in the North Section. He is static, at two hundred and seventy degrees from the detector.'

A wave of adrenalin swept through the tramp. They must be on to him! Not that he was doing any harm.

Besides, he had more right than they had to be there. He had squatter's rights. He'd staked a claim the day before.

But now the blood was back in his veins, and he was determined to run.

He hurried back to the side door. Unaccountably it wouldn't budge. He sweated to pull it open, but something held it rigid. He knew there was a second door in the warehouse. It meant crossing part of the store room, but there was nothing else for it. He saw the little group of men advancing on him, and made a dash for it. He got halfway across the room, but it was hopeless. He tried to control his voice, but it shook as he called out, 'Look. if you're the Law, I'm clean. Stands to reason, I have to be – I've just come out... a couple of weeks ago... You've got nothing on me!'

The group of men had stopped. They didn't appear to understand what he was telling them.

'Well, if you ain't the Law, it's all right with me. Live and let live, I say. I don't give a cuss what you're doing here. None of my business... I'll just move on.. find another place to doss.' He gave a brave wave of the hand. ''Night, all,' he called.

'Cover the door,' ordered Brett.

The group fanned out in a half-circle, moving slowly but relentlessly. The outcome was never in doubt.

'What kind of a welcome is this?' pleaded the tramp.

'When a bloke's just out of jug... They won't get a word out of me.' He turned to Brett. 'I promise you, guv.'

He was panic-stricken. He tried to back off. He was up against the wall..

'What's this then? A ruddy madhouse? What's going on? What *are* you, anyhow?'

No one bothered to reply.

'Keep off. Get your 'ands off... Get back... Get away from me!' The last

was little more than a shriek.

The knot of men surrounded him as he shook the handle of the door. He was out of vision as far as the central computer was concerned. The eye-line was obscured, but the noise abruptly diminished – the wail of the alarm stopped dead – the baleful revolving lights faded and a soft glow filled the room. The group dispersed. It was as though nothing had happened.

Everyone was studiously back at work.

'Repeat,' said Brett, 'I repeat... Prototype to be completed by dawn..

Breakfast with Sir Charles Summer was an opportunity for the Doctor to catch up with the news of the day. Passing through so many Time Zones made it difficult to pinpoint just exactly what period of Time – historically – one was in. His mind adjusted automatically, but he felt more at ease when he'd glanced through the newspapers for the last few weeks.

It was a rare occasion for the Doctor to have breakfast at all, much less a full English breakfast. It took his digestive system a day or two to adjust to the differences between planets and centuries.

But he had to admit that he had enjoyed his kippers, poached eggs, toast, marmalade, and endless cups of tea.

The process came to a full stop as he flipped through the pages of one of the later editions of the morning paper.

'Good gracious!' said the Doctor.

'What is it, Doctor?' asked Sir Charles.

His guest laid the paper on the table before them. 'Look at that,' said the Doctor.

Sir Charles frowned over the item. 'It appears a tramp has been found dead not far from Covent Garden.'

'Precisely,' said the Doctor. 'Found in a gutter at three o'clock.' He looked thoughtful. 'I can't remember exactly what the time was when we last saw him.'

'You know the man?' Sir Charles raised his eye-brows.

'We met last night for the first time,' said the Doctor.

‘Or rather this morning... We took his taxi to come here.’

‘What an extraordinary coincidence.’ But Sir Charles was not particularly concerned. He read aloud: ‘The police appear to believe it was a road accident.’

‘I suppose that’s possible,’ said the Doctor.

‘You doubt it?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know.’ The Doctor frowned again. He was assailed by doubts.

‘Besides,’ went on Sir Charles, ‘I would like your advice on a very real problem which has cropped up.’

‘Certainly.’

Sir Charles handed two letters to the Doctor. ‘These arrived this morning. Both letters of resignation, and both from absolutely splendid scientists in my Faculty.’

The Doctor read them through. ‘H’mm. No reason given in either, I see.’

‘That’s the strange thing,’ nodded Sir Charles. ‘Two of my best men.’

The Doctor noted that both letters were written in a similar style, but he said nothing.

‘I’ve been unable to get in touch with them,’ added Sir Charles. ‘No one appears to have seen them since last night. Extraordinary, isn’t it? Two first-class scientists suddenly vanish.’

The Doctor looked thoughtfully at Sir Charles. ‘Now I wonder... Do you suppose... I mean, if... No, I don’t suppose you would.’

Both men turned as Polly knocked and carne into the room.

‘I hope I’m not late,’ she said breathlessly.

‘Late for what?’ Sir Charles was puzzled.

‘For work,’ said Polly. ‘If you show me where your secretary has her desk, I’ll start at once.’

‘I don’t follow,’ said Sir Charles.

‘But Major Green told me to get round here as quickly as possible. Professor Brett won’t need me today. I understood your secretary was ill.’

‘Actually she is away today. But I don’t see how Brett or anyone else could have known about it.. But I’ll be glad of your help. Her office is through there. I’ll join you shortly.’

‘Right.’ Polly turned to the Doctor. ‘How is Dodo this morning?’

‘Here she is now,’ said the Doctor. ‘She’ll tell you herself.’

Dodo had just walked into the room.

‘I’m fine,’ said Dodo. She sounded a little cool. ‘Isn’t it time you began work?’

Polly raised her eyebrows. ‘Sorry I asked,’ she said as she went out.

‘I hope I haven’t kept you waiting, Doctor,’ said Dodo.

‘Not at all,’ said the Doctor, surprised. It was unlike Dodo to be so curt with anyone. He turned to Sir Charles.

‘Sorry I can’t help you with your problem. I’m rather out of touch these days.’

Sir Charles was still thumbing through his letters. ‘It won’t be easy to fill their places. Men of this quality are hard to find. Especially with their high level of computer knowledge.’

‘Computers?’ The Doctor looked at him sharply.

‘The man who could help you there is surely Professor Brett,’ said Dodo unexpectedly.

‘That’s true,’ agreed Sir Charles.

‘We could call round and see him now,’ she suggested to the Doctor.

‘I thought you wanted to show me London,’ he said.

‘This sounds much more important,’ she said.

‘That’s very understanding of you, my dear.’ Dodo was becoming very responsible, mused the Doctor.

‘I’m ready,’ she said promptly.

But the Doctor hesitated. ‘Perhaps we should make an appointment. Maybe I should phone him first?’

She agreed quickly. ‘Yes, that would be best.’

‘Go ahead. Use the phone,’ said Sir Charles.

The Doctor thanked him as he dialled the number. He heard a voice at the other end of the line. ‘Hello... I’d like to speak to Professor Brett please... Yes. That’s correct...’

In his office, Brett covered the phone with his hand and turned to where Krimpton was receiving a spate of signals from Wotan.

‘It’s the Doctor... On the line! Feed him through. Direct to Wotan!’

Krimpton operated a switch. A light blazed from the computer. A new sound emanated from within... a high-pitched whine which was soft at first but rapidly increased in intensity.

Dodo watched the Doctor expectantly. She knew what was about to happen. She could even hear the high-pitched sound herself.

‘Hello... Hello...’ He could make no sense of what was happening. There must be something wrong with the phone.

He held one hand over his other ear... A pain shot through his head... It was like an electric shock... And yet, try as he might, he could hardly pull the receiver away from his other ear. It could have been a powerful magnet.

With all his strength, the Doctor managed to throw it aside. He staggered under the impact. The force sent him tumbling to the floor.

Dodo hid her triumph by running to the table and pouring a glass of water. ‘Are you all right, Doctor?’

He waved the glass aside as Sir Charles helped him to his feet.

‘I’m all right.’

‘I’ll get the girl to call a doctor,’ said Sir Charles anxiously.

‘No need.’ The Doctor appeared to have recovered.

‘Then take some brandy at least,’ insisted Sir Charles.

He hurried away.

As soon as he had gone Dodo turned to the Doctor comfortingly. ‘Don’t be alarmed,’ she said. ‘This is merely a method of establishing contact... Sometimes it has to be like this as time is so short.’

The Doctor at by the table, still dazed, unsure he heard her properly.

‘You must know construction has begun already,’ she whispered. ‘You are needed urgently.’

He was holding his head in his hands; now he looked up. ‘What happened?’

She wanted to reassure him. That way they would be able to get to work quickly. ‘It’s safe to tell you now, Doctor. You are one of us. One of the advance guard. We have an enormous honour. My function was to bring you into contact. Now I shall serve as an assistant until discarded.’

The Doctor pressed his hands against his head. The echo of that infernal noise still persisted. What on earth was Dodo saying? ‘Whatever are you talking about, Dodo?’

‘Listen carefully, Doctor. This construction is taking place at several strategic points in London...’

He interrupted, looking up at her. ‘I’m sorry, Dodo. I don’t think I’m hearing you properly... My head feels as though it had been struck a terrible blow, but that’s a little better... Now, what were you saying?’

He was making a great effort to concentrate. Dodo looked at him, overcome with doubts... Beginning to wonder if he really had...?

‘But you made the call,’ she said. ‘You made contact, didn’t you?’

‘I certainly contacted something,’ said the Doctor ruefully. ‘Yes, I remember asking to speak to Professor Brett, then everything seemed to explode. I was knocked off my feet. It was as if... as if...’

‘What, Doctor?’ She had to know how much he might have guessed.

‘I can’t explain. But as if something enormous and terribly powerful had nearly consumed me... nearly absorbed me.’

She looked at him, shocked. So he had not been consumed or absorbed... as she and all the others had been.

He was still himself – still alien to their cause.

The Doctor was speaking, trying to clarify his feelings.

'I know it sounds ridiculous... Perhaps the telephone line is at fault. Something as simple as that... An ordinary, or rather an extraordinary, electric shock.'

She had to be sure. 'You received no instructions?'

He peered at her. 'My dear child! Instructions from whom?'

'From... from...' Her mind seemed to come to a stop.

Sir Charles hurried in with a glass and decanter. 'Have a tot of this.'

'Thank you.' The Doctor took a couple of sips. 'Well, Sir Charles, either your phone is badly out of order or...' He frowned.

'Or what?' asked Sir Charles.

'I hesitate to think.' The Doctor looked round quickly to see Dodo about to slip out of the room.

'Stay where you are, Dodo!' he called.

The door to the office opened and Polly looked out. 'Is something the matter?'

'I believe there is,' said the Doctor grimly. 'A new and very deadly danger threatens all of us. And it seems to originate from Professor Brett's office.'

'Impossible,' said Polly. 'That's where I work.'

'I don't follow,' said Sir Charles. 'I don't understand.'

The Doctor spoke almost to himself. 'I don't think any of us do as yet.'

Dodo remained motionless at the door. Now he called her over. She moved towards him slowly, almost reluctantly, as though a struggle were going on inside her.

'Sit down, my child,' said the Doctor, and she obeyed him.

For a moment he held her head in his hands and stared into her eyes. The others looked on.

'As I suspected,' said the Doctor, 'she's in some sort of trance. A form of hypnotism, very deep-seated...

fundamental. I can't say I have seen before anything as powerfully destructive of the personality. But...' he shrugged, 'we can but try.'

He passed his fingers over her brow, seeming to seek out nerve centres. Then he put pressure on the sides of her head.

'Listen to me, child,' he said. 'I want you to repeat "I am Dodo Chaplet... I am able to resist all attempts to transform me into someone – or something – else."'

It was an enormous effort for the girl, but she spoke slowly, painfully, repeating what the Doctor had said.

'I shall count to five,' said the Doctor, 'and when I finish counting you will go to sleep. When you awake, you will have forgotten all about this – er – distressing affair.'

The on-lookers weren't sure whether she had heard.

'I shall start counting. One... two... three...'

Dodo's eyes began to close.

'Four... five...'

Her head fell forward and she was heavily asleep.

The Doctor examined her for a moment. 'She will sleep for about forty-eight hours... After that she must have a complete rest... She has gone through a traumatic experience... And survived, I am happy to say.'

'And you're sure she's going to be all right?' asked Polly.

'She will be her old self again,' said the Doctor.

'Thank goodness for that.' Polly took a deep breath. 'I feel it was my fault. I should have looked after her better.'

Neither man noticed as she left the room.

‘I tell you what,’ said Sir Charles. ‘I’ll arrange for Dodo to be taken down to my place in the country. My wife will be glad to look after her.’

‘That’s very kind of you.’ The Doctor looked at the face of the sleeping girl. ‘Take good care of her. She has been a very brave and loyal friend.’

Sir Charles nodded. He turned to call for Polly. ‘Now where has that girl gone?’ Life, in the eyes of Sir Charles, was full of the unexpected.

The Doctor stood by Dodo, watching her closely, as though trying to read a secret.

‘She said something,’ he mused. ‘Something about the strategic points in London... I wonder what she meant.’

Sir Charles shook his head. It was all beyond him...

## 7

## A Demonstration of Power

The strategic points were varied, and they had been in use, most of them, for several hours.

At London Airport a uniformed group of men merged with the general staff, using trucks, loaders, workshops, acting as security patrols, and going about official business with great efficiency.

The central railway stations also had inconspicuous individuals close to positions of control. Even some of the city’s famous buildings appeared to have an influx of new workers, unchallenged after the first few encounters with the authorities.

It was a silent, bloodless take-over which included the Television Centre of the BBC, radio stations, and other centres of communication and transport.

There were never many of such anonymous strangers, but always sufficient to take the reins into their own hands.

Such preparations drew little attention to themselves, but they were continuous. London was being prepared for an assault.

The warehouse at Covent Garden was by no means the only one to be working flat-out that morning, but it was the first into production.

Inside, the first machine was taking shape, and was remarkable in its resemblance to the human form. A small square 'head' now topped the massive body. In this way it was similar to Wotan. Perhaps that was why the model was turning out as it was – Wotan had been designed by man...

influenced by his own experience, and Wotan in turn had devised a generation close to its own experience. Even as he worked, Brett guessed that future generations would create other forms for themselves, less and less like their originators.

But he had no time for such speculation. He was involved with the new functions that Wotan had produced.

This machine – the War Machine, as it was coded – had a mobile base. It had wheels which it had power to direct and control. This gave it great flexibility for such a heavy structure.

The other aspect that Brett noted with the any fragment of his mind that seemed to remain his own, was that although the body of the machine was not complete, the

'head' was alive! It was functioning, thinking, instructing, turning from left to right, observing balefully, shining its blinding beams of light, dazzling all those on whom it turned, even as they worked to complete the whole. It was an uncanny feeling to be putting together the creature – if creature it was – while the thing was already alive in so many of its parts. Deep within, the computer existed like a nervous system, throbbing with an energy and power that even Wotan could not match.

Brett was no longer capable of rational thought; he followed the flow of blue-prints that arrived from his own office, his energy unflagging.

There were sections under development about which Brett knew nothing. Like all those around, he obeyed orders, and he stood aside as Major Green waved away the rest of the work force. The Major carried a short, squat object which looked like an automatic shot-gun. After all, that would be something the Major would understand.

'Stand back!' shouted the Major. 'Destructive mechanism to be fitted for testing.'

The mechanism fitted exactly into the War Machine.

Everything came together with a mathematical precision which Brett

noted with approval. The arms of the Machine were able to turn the weapon at any angle.

‘Prepare for demonstration,’ called the Major.

The group around the Machine parted as the weapon was raised and sighted. They looked on, impassively.

A short distance away another worker stacked crates against a wall. He heard the Major’s order and began to move away.

‘Stay where you are!’ called the Major. ‘And stand still.’

The man made no protest. He faced the Machine as it adjusted its sights.

The Major read an instrument before him. ‘Bearing 52

degrees. Distance thirty feet. Elevation five feet ten inches.

Impact to be fatal.’

The Machine flashed and crackled a spate of signals.

‘Aim adjusted,’ said the Major. ‘Results to be logged...

Test... Fire!’

There was a flash of white light, and a faint, dull explosion.

The man against the wall slowly slid to the ground.

‘Effective at thirty feet,’ said the Major.

There was an urgent message for both Brett and Krimpton.

They were to return to Brett’s office.

They stood before Wotan as the computer rattled out a single question... Where was the Doctor?

‘We have had no word from the girl,’ said Brett.

‘She may have failed again,’ said Krimpton.

‘Other means must be used,’ Wotan burst forth. ‘The Doctor is essential. Failure is not permitted our tolerated.’

There was the sound of the outer door opening.

‘That could be the girl.’ Brett opened the door.

Polly hurried in, A look of relief lit up her face as she saw Brett. ‘Thank goodness you’re here, Professor,’ she said. ‘Something very odd has been happening. Are you all right?’

Brett moved behind her and closed the door.

She was aware of something strange about the two men.

They moved stiffly, their eyes were blank. She was suddenly very frightened.

‘We must destroy in order to protect,’ said Krimpton, as though he were repeating a lesson.

Brett was locking the door.

The Doctor watched Dodo being driven away, still asleep as if drugged, and then returned to the house. He was surprised to find a visitor.

‘Bless my soul, it’s Ben! How did you know I was here?’

The sailor looked worried; the cockney sparkle had gone. ‘Hope you don’t mind me turning up, Doctor, but I had this appointment to meet Polly. Lunchtime, she said. ’Course she might have thought better of it, and just given me the elbow.’

‘She didn’t keep the appointment?’

‘She didn’t. And they told me at the Post Office Tower that she’d come here.’

‘She’s already left,’ the Doctor told him. ‘This is something I feared.’

‘Something wrong, Doc?’ He glanced round. ‘No sign of Dodo?’

‘Dodo has gone to the country for a few days’ rest. I am no longer worried about her. It’s Polly who might need your help.’

‘’Course she might have gone up-market and doesn’t want to know me in the light of day.’

‘I doubt that,’ said the Doctor. He picked up the morning paper and

handed it to Ben. ‘Have you seen this?’

He glanced at it. ‘Yes, I thought it was the old fellow we met last night. Bit of a coincidence. What’s that got to do with Polly?’

‘I’m not sure it has anything to do with her... but it may have. Indeed, it may have something to do with a greater problem.’ He hesitated. ‘I wonder if you’d like to help me, my boy?’

‘Spell it out, Doctor.’

‘You remember when we left that club last night?’

‘Yes.’

‘I seem to remember the poor fellow was still with you as we drove off?’

‘Right,’ said Ben. ‘I asked him if he had a bed and he pointed to this warehouse. Said he had a place to doss down there.’

‘Do you think you could find it?’

‘Certain I could.’

‘This might be dangerous,’ warned the Doctor.

‘Spice of life,’ grinned Ben. He was beginning to enjoy himself.

‘ *Very* dangerous,’ added the Doctor.

‘I’ll watch it,’ Ben nodded.

‘I’d like you to have a look round there. A little investigation. Don’t attract attention... and take care.’

Ben grinned again. ‘Will do, Doc.’

He didn’t lose any time, leaving the Doctor poring over a sheaf of documents, plans, photos and information about the Post Office Tower and the research that went on there.

He was already putting together the pieces of a jigsaw, and the picture grew more alarming.

Ben was surprised to find the area round the warehouse so sparsely populated. It was almost like a no-go area. The truck which had been

parked there the night before was still in position. The only people he saw were a couple of men, hanging about, apparently doing nothing. Ben read the signs. They were on guard... but guarding what?

He walked casually by, went down an alleyway, made sure he wasn't watched, then doubled back.

The tramp had said there was a side door. Ben slipped into the little courtyard that backed onto the buildings. It was stacked with boxes, rubbish, rotting vegetables.

The side door was hidden by the litter, but he found it.

As he began to open it, he heard a strange sound from within. He tried to make out what it could be... A clanking noise, probably mechanical... and the hum of something electronic, reminding him of a ship's engine.

There were also voices, a subdued mutter, as though many people were speaking very quietly. It was an eerie feeling to be standing at that door, listening.

He pushed the door gently, and it swung in slightly. He could hear quite clearly.

A man called out, 'Silence... Stand by... Fire...'

A burst of faint explosions followed – not like any gunfire that Ben had ever heard before. He was startled.

The Doctor had warned him it might be dangerous, but what was this? He moved cautiously into the darkened corridor. Another door lay ahead.

Major Green recorded the pattern of the weapon. It was almost perfect. The War Machine sprayed shot along the stack of crates. The results were devastating. Its range increased with each test. Metals were shattered.

'Stand by for tests on arm action!' The Major wasn't sure what the tests would be, for by now the Machine had begun to take over its own decision-making.

'Demonstrate power of body,' the Major ordered. He was as shaken as the other onlookers as the Machine lifted its massive arms aloft and brought them down with a crash on the heavy table beside it. It

splintered like a matchbox.

‘Test satisfactory,’ the Major managed to record. ‘Sight testing,’ he called.

Front where he stood, peering through the tiny opening in the door, Ben looked on, transfixed.

The head-like section of the strange contraption was beginning to rotate from side to side. The rays of light from two positions like eye sockets passed across the warehouse as a lighthouse might throw its beams. As it flamed across the door Ben just had time to pull back out of sight.

He heard the man calling, ‘Eyesight to be improved.

Distance insufficient.’

Ben opened the door – a tiny crack – and saw the Machine. It was undergoing a change. The throb of inner power increased; energy seemed to be generated to an explosive point.

‘Movement test!’ called the Major.

The noise from the dynamo reached an intensity that filled the room. Ben felt his head; the pressure had become painful. The Machine began to shake... and then of its own accord it started to move... Slowly at first... very slowly.

Then with increasing speed, greater assurance. sudden power... A great surge of something like arrogance, it seemed to Ben. It was alive! The Machine had taken over control of itself. He saw with his own eyes what had happened, but could not believe it! He was startled, incredulous!

The Machine continued its circle round the warehouse, knocking aside anything that came into its path, careless of all before it. People scattered as it approached, sweeping through the crowd, ignoring those who had constructed it–

its eyes growing brighter, beginning to blaze, dazzling those caught in its beams, like rabbits in a car’s headlights.

It went faster, starting to turn and twist, to experiment with new powers, doubling back on itself, and then discovering a fresh sense– the need to play games. It raced forward, scattering a knot of men,

turned and harried one of them, following the man as he scrambled away... Jerking back and forward, teasing the now desperate man it had marked down as its quarry. In his panic he stumbled and fell. He managed to roll aside as the Machine sped after him. But the mechanism was up to such manoeuvres; it could change its course instantly. The man on the ground saw it coming. Perhaps it would have laughed, had laughter been programmed into it. As it was, it merely rolled forward... Testing... testing...

Ben couldn't see what happened, but he heard the scream, and was aware of the silence that followed.

After that the Machine slowed down a little, sweeping a pile of crates to the floor, and rolling through the debris.

Undoubtedly the test programme had been a success as well.

Ben wasn't sure how long he stood just beyond the door, the tiny opening revealing the bizarre activity beyond. His brain seemed to have come to a stop; he was stunned. It didn't occur to him to turn and run. What he was witnessing was so incredible... so impossible. Not even a dream...

The Machine came to a halt in the centre of the room.

The head spun slowly round, the light from the eyes flickered irregularly, sweeping round the crowded warehouse as though seeking someone. Then it broke into a high, wavering sound.

The Major hurried foward. He snatched up a number of messages – slips that spilled to the ground. An alarm bell sounded.

For a second or two it did not occur to Ben that this turmoil had anything to do with him, then he was aware of his own danger. He backed towards the outer door.

He didn't notice the figure standing in the dark behind him.

Someone had entered from the street, and stood watching in silence.

The Major shouted: 'Warning! There is a stranger amongst us. He must be found at once. Begin searching!'

Ben had moved just in time.

He turned and was face to face with Polly!

‘Polly! What are you doing here?’ He couldn’t disguise his alarm.

She was calm and collected. ‘I came to look for you.’

‘Did the Doctor tell you I was here?’

She hesitated for a second. ‘Yes.’

She took a step towards the warehouse door.

Ben grabbed her arm. ‘Don’t go in there!’

‘Why?’

‘We must get away from here.’ He couldn’t explain now.

But she didn’t move.

‘Quickly,’ he whispered. ‘I’ve got to report back to the Doctor.’

‘What’s in there?’ she asked. He thought she was unusually placid – not at all like she had been the day before.

‘I can’t tell you,’ he said. ‘You wouldn’t believe it.’

She didn’t seem impressed, and pushed his arm aside as she headed for the door.

Ben pulled her back. ‘Listen! Keep out of there. This way, Polly. Come on!’

She asked ‘Why?’ in the same dull, flat voice.

He was exasperated. ‘Because it’s a ruddy madhouse in there! It’s packed with people who have gone off their heads! They’re brain-washed, or hypnotised, or something!’

‘You saw them?’

‘I’m telling you!’

‘What else did you see?’ She was quite unmoved. Ben was bewildered. ‘There’s a sort of machine... Must be one of these computers... but it’s a living computer! It moves!

It’s just killed some poor bloke.. I tell you, Polly. Move fast. We’ve got to get out of here!’

She was motionless, standing between him and the inner door. The same man could be heard not far away.

‘The Major,’ said Polly.

‘The intruder is just beyond that door,’ shouted the Major. ‘The bearing is two hundred and fifteen degrees. He is to be taken at once.’

‘That’s it,’ said Ben. ‘Believe me now... this way. fast!’

‘Power locks on all escape points!’ shouted the Major.

‘He is not to be allowed to leave the building.’

Ben moved quickly towards the street door. He thought Polly was following as he saw her hurry after him, but she stopped by the side of the door and reached up to press a wall button. The door appeared suddenly magnetised, being pulled flush with the wall. He tried to wrench it open. It was as rigid as a rock.

‘For heaven’s sake, Polly! What have you done?’

‘I have my instructions,’ she said flatly.

He stared at her in the dark beside him, betraying no emotion. ‘What’s happened to you?’ But he was already guessing the answer.

‘You are not to get away,’ said Polly.

He made a dive for the wall button, but she stood in his way.

She was surprisingly strong, but he threw her aside, and had one hand on the button when the door behind burst open, and he went down under a heap of men. He lashed out in desperation, but the odds were against him. And the girl stood quietly looking on.

‘You don’t know what you’re doing, Polly!’ he shouted.

‘Get the Doctor... Now... before it’s too late.’

The Major called from the next room. ‘Bring him. The Machine wishes to deal with him.’

He struggled as they dragged him along the corridor.

‘Get help, Polly! Get help!’

She followed them into the store room.

The Major stood by the side of the Machine; now he was merely some form of adjunct... A mouthpiece.. his own individuality quite gone, and dominated by the structure that towered over him.

'The intruder has been spying,' said the Major.

'Polly!' A last shout.

She didn't react... He had a feeling that in a sense she didn't even hear.

**8**

**The One Who Got Away**

The Doctor paced up and down in Sir Charles's library, while his host looked on anxiously.

'Take my advice, Doctor. Try to relax. There's no point in upsetting yourself like this.'

'He should have been back hours ago,' said the Doctor.

'I should never have let him go.'

'You know what young people are like.' Sir Charles tried to ease matters. 'He's probably quite forgotten your instructions. He could be off doing something else.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'Not that young man. He seemed far too responsible to me. No – if he hasn't phoned back it's because he isn't able to. Something must have happened.'

'But what?'

The Doctor didn't like to speculate.

'But if you're really concerned,' went on Sir Charles,

'perhaps we should contact the police.'

'Using the police at this stage might just drive this menace underground,' said the Doctor.

Sir Charles had heard all this before, as the Doctor had expressed his

fears.

‘But what menace?’ he barked. ‘You can’t tell me what you suspect... And you can’t show any evidence either!

What worries me, Doctor, is that if this sort of rumour gets out, what is going to happen to our "Switch-On" day?

People have worked for years for this occasion. This type of talk would ruin everything.’

‘We may very well have more than rumours to contend with, if we’re not careful,’ said the Doctor grimly. He began to stride up and down again... ‘Where is that boy!’

Ben found he was looking up at the Machine as though it were a living being. Although it was the Major at its side who did the talking, it was obvious who – or what –

dominated the scene. They were all subjected to this inhuman creation. All, except himself, in that packed store room. It was like facing a judge – or, more exactly, an executioner.

The Major was listing a series of actions, charging him with some new type of crime.

Ben listened in a daze.

‘You tried to warn human authorities of the work going on in this building,’ intoned the Major. ‘You are clearly an enemy of mechanised evolution.’

It was the first time he had even heard of it, Ben thought.

‘Nothing must prevent Machines from taking over from mankind the domination of the universe. This is the next stage in the growth of the life-force on this planet. In order to achieve this, all obstacles are to be destroyed... You have acted as such an obstacle.’

It was clear that a judgement had been passed. The trial had been conducted in a few brief moments, and was now over. This was to be a lesson to those present – although they didn’t need any lessons; they were absolute converts already.

The Machine began to build up a different sound within, the lights glowed placidly. Justice was about to take its course. It moved

forward slightly – the heavy arm began to rise.

No one moved or protested – nothing extraordinary was happening.

‘Are you all out of your minds?’ Ben tried to struggle, but he was firmly held by half a dozen men. ‘Can’t you see what’s happening? It will be your turn next!’

The Major turned to him. ‘Do you not understand? We are all required by Wotan... that is our function. When that is complete, of course we may become redundant. That is fate... as it ought to be. When the tool is no longer of any use, it is rational to put it aside.’

There was no point in protesting. He was going to be destroyed as a useless piece of equipment. Yes, machinery was really taking its revenge! It had indeed turned the tables... Well, there was no point in whining... but he would have liked to tell the Doctor... That would have shaken the old man!

He was aware that someone had stepped forward from the watching group.

‘What does the girl want?’ asked the Major.

Polly was puzzled to find herself in front of the others, side by side with this sailor. She didn’t understand what had made her step forward. But she found herself speaking.

‘I ant the one who trapped this intruder.’

‘That is correct,’ agreed the Major.

‘I did not let him escape.’

‘True.’

‘Wotan requires all the labour we can find,’ she went on.

‘Perhaps it is too soon to destroy this stranger. Why do we not require him to work first? To help in this great task, and then to destroy him later?’

‘How are you to know what Wotan would require?’

asked the Major.

The Machine was fractionally subdued. Lights dimmed, the dynamo

hummed softly.

‘I have just come from the offices of Professor Brett.

These are his orders. So they are directives from Wotan.’

There was a moment’s silence.

It seemed an age to Ben.

‘Very well,’ said the Major slowly. ‘He is to work for the time being. He will work for us now.’ He waved dismissively to the crowd, ‘Time has been wasted. Return to your tasks... all of you... now.’

The crowd moved quietly away. They resumed what they had been doing. There had been a hitch, but it was over now. It was as though there had been no interruption.

‘’Strewth!’ Ben took a deep breath. ‘That was a close one. Thanks, gal. You really played them along. You even had me fooled.’

She looked at him coldly. ‘You have been spared. You most now show your gratitude. Work hard for the success of this sacred Cause.’

‘Eh? What cause?’

‘The victory of the War Machines.’

Polly moved back to her work. Ben hesitated a second, then followed suit. All he could do now, wasn’t it? Lie low.

Keep his head down... wait his chance... If it ever came up!

Both Brett and Krimpton received the directive from Wotan. It came in the form of a series of signals.

‘All War Machines will be completed and ready by noon tomorrow. The deadline has been brought forward.’

They repeated the orders to one another, standing in front of Wotan.

‘Machines have been programmed to destroy any human life that opposes them.’

‘The order to launch the attack comes from Wotan alone.’

‘Covent Garden War Machine is closest to completion.

But none are yet fully developed. They are in the stages of final testing.'

'All Machines must be under one discipline. They are to attack simultaneously.'

There was a pause as the two men awaited the next spate of instructions.

'The object of the attack,' said Brett, 'is to occupy the strategic points in the city. The War Machines are to assume total control over human authority.'

'By noon tomorrow,' repeated Krimpton.

The message came through to the warehouse. To achieve the new deadline the pressure had to be increased. The Machine drove through the room with the Major in tow, dealing out blows as he saw the workers around him stagger at their benches. Those who collapsed made way for others, always standing by. They were putting together a second and a third structure, each an improvement on the previous version. The material used became lighter, yet more impenetrable.

'Such an alloy will take War Machines to the moon,' the Major informed those around him. The speed of development was possible as information flooded from the computers.

It appeared strange to Ben that this vast increase in scientific technology should depend on such a primitive activity as human labour. These men and women, staggering under heavy loads, like coolies a hundred years earlier, were little different to the slaves who built the pyramids. If this was an example of the benefits of science, he for one could do without it!

But he made a great show of putting his back into his work as the Major strode by in the wake of the War Machine, issuing orders, and handing out blows. 'Faster there! Faster! Anyone who fails to work will be dispensed with.'

Although it was the man who spoke, the words were undoubtedly issuing from the machine, and Ben made sure he shifted a heavy crate at speed as they viewed him in passing.

The moment they had gone, he lowered his load, and carefully checked to see where Polly was.

She worked by herself a few steps away, and looked as though she were on the point of collapse.

He managed to move closer. ‘You all right?’ he asked.

‘Why do you speak to me?’ she replied coldly.

‘See if you’re all right, girl. You look on your knees to me.’

‘I am well, and happy to work for the triumph of the Machines.’

‘No accounting for tastes,’ muttered Ben. ‘But you’re allin, love.’

‘That is not important.’

He guessed he wasn’t going to make contact. ‘Oh, sure.

Yeah.’

‘The work must now be completed by tomorrow noon,’

said Polly. ‘There is no time to speak.’

He looked at her sharply. ‘Why noon?’

‘Then the attack begins.’

‘The attack?’

‘The city will be taken over by the Machines.’

‘Oh, that.’ He pretended he knew. ‘And you’re looking forward to it?’

‘Of course.’

He nodded his agreement. ‘On with the job,’ he said, and cautiously looked round. ‘Taken the guards off the doors, I see,’ he said.

Polly seemed to know what was going on. ‘Naturally.

None of us wish to leave. We don’t need guards. All we wish for is victory.’

‘Good thinking,’ said Ben. ‘Dedicated to our task. An open prison, in a way. No one wants to leave. No wonder.

It’s a real cushy billet here.’

He moved away, humping a crate on his back, and making sure it shielded him from where the Major kept watch.

'Explosives to be prepared,' he was shouting. 'Collection over here.'

A line of used crates were stacked against the wall. Ben checked them. They ran parallel to the wall. With a little pushing and shoving he reckoned he could make a passageway to the door.

He started to edge behind the crates, saw he was seen...

stopped, pretended to be checking... saw he was no longer being observed, and quickly ducked down out of sight.

He made his way along the wall. Once or twice he had to shift rubble, but he could still see the door. Freedom from this nightmare was in his grasp.

From where she worked, Polly stood watching the occasional movement of the crates as Ben forced his way behind them. And when he had to come from behind cover and make a dash for the door, she saw him, still watching impassively, hesitating, then returning to her work.

He opened the door just wide enough to slip out, careful not to set off any alarms again.

The air outside was intoxicating.

The Doctor decided it was time for action. The waiting had been the hardest thing for him.

'I'm going myself,' he informed Sir Charles.

'But Doctor! What can you do?'

The Doctor was adamant. 'After what happened to Dodo I should have known. I should never have let those young people out of my sight.'

He had opened the front door as the street bell rang.

Ben stood in the doorway. The Doctor was shocked at his appearance.

'Ben!... Thank goodness!' The Doctor peered at him.

'What in heaven's name has happened?'

Ben steadied himself. ‘I’m okay,’ he said. ‘It’s Polly and the others we’ve got to worry about.’

They got him into the house. Even then his words didn’t make much sense. ‘She’s still there, Doc. They’ve got her. Well, at least, he’s got her. Or it’s probably that machine that’s got her... It’s got all of them. I don’t know how they’ve done it! Hundreds of people, working to help this killer machine. And going about it quite cheerful!

Signing their own death war-rant, most like!’

‘And Polly is one of them?’

‘Too true... Enthusiastic, she is! Not her fault, Doc. She doesn’t know what she’s doing. None of them do. Not even that ruddy Major. They’re all just creatures of that flaming machine.’

‘Where is she?’

‘In that warehouse. Where you said. I tell you, Doc, if we don’t stop it, half of London will cop it.’

Sir Charles had said little. Now he looked at the young sailor as though he thought him off his head.

There was no let-up in the warehouse, although the Major realised from the signals he received that they were keeping pace with their schedules. Every second that could be saved was a reward in itself. He was helped in every way by a battery of instruments and calculators.

It was in checking these instruments that he realised one discrepancy. One of the workforce was missing. A double check and that missing person was identified.

He faced Polly. ‘Where is the stranger?’ he demanded.

She stood before him, unresponsive, with an air of puzzlement, genuinely troubled.

‘You are responsible for him,’ the Major informed her.

‘Where is he?’

In the background the War Machine moved in closer. It recorded the unease... A grating sound built up from within.

‘Do you know what has happened to him?’ the Major insisted.

Polly couldn't understand the struggle going on inside her. Her loyalties should be clear and obvious. She was dedicated to this wonderful work... And yet...

'Answer!' the Major ordered.

'He escaped,' she said simply.

'How do you know?'

'I saw him.'

'You saw him?' The Major looked at her blankly. 'And you didn't give the alarm?'

She hesitated. 'No.'

He tried to understand. 'Why not?'

'I don't know.'

'He has gone... and you let him go?'

She was unable to understand her own actions. She could think of only one thing. 'He was my friend.'

The Major blinked at her. 'You have no friends,' he said. 'You are an instrument. You work for the Machines!'

She nodded; she agreed. That was correct.

The Major turned to where the Machine had stopped beside him. 'She has betrayed Wotan,' he said. 'She must be punished. She must be returned to Wotan at once.'

As if they had received a signal, two men moved in beside Polly and escorted her away.

Sir Charles had difficulty in restraining himself. 'Don't tell me you believe this fantastic story, Doctor!' For some reason the Doctor had been sitting, listening to this load of rubbish! There must be something wrong with the boy!

'I'm afraid I do,' said the Doctor.

'What! You think there's a machine, put together by us, by scientists, by mankind... and it's came to life! That it's far in advance of us!'

‘Only intellectually,’ said the Doctor.

Sir Charles didn’t want to continue that line of thought.

‘I had my suspicions before,’ added the Doctor.

‘Oh really, Doctor! The boy’s suffering from some sort of delusion, that’s all.’

‘Are you sure of that, Sir Charles?’

Well, what else...’

‘So you aren’t sure?’

‘It’s impossible! Here? In the heart of London!’

Every second of time that was wasted was vital, and Ben knew it. He was in despair at the way his report had been received. Sir Charles thought he was a fool.

‘Look, Doctor! Do something! It’s happening now!

Don’t let’s waste any more time. For a start, Polly’s there on her own.’

‘This is not a waste of time, my boy. We need Sir Charles. We need his authority. No one is going to listen to us, or act on our word. Without Sir Charles we can do nothing.’

Ben turned to the other man. ‘Then every minute that passes is down to you, guy. They’re putting together an arsenal that could blow up London.’

‘Then why haven’t the police forces been informed?’

‘I’m informing you now, ain’t I? What are you going to do about it?’ and when Sir Charles hesitated Ben went on:

‘I tell you, they were going to do me in. What more proof do you want? You could be telling the coppers now! And if you don’t, it’ll be on your head!’

‘The boy is talking sense,’ said the Doctor.

Sir Charles was unconvinced. ‘Well... If you consider it necessary, I’ll have a word with the Commissioner.’

The Doctor stopped him. ‘Maybe the police are not sufficient for this situation.’

‘We can leave it to the Commissioner to decide,’ said Sir Charles coolly. ‘How many people did you say there were in this... er... this warehouse?’

‘Could be over a hundred,’ said Ben.

‘All obeying this machine of yours?’

‘Right... And what’s more the girl said something about an attack tomorrow noon. That should get a few dead-heads moving!’

‘We’ll see... It should be a routine matter to surround the place and arrest a hundred or so unsuspecting citizens.

It’s probably one of those strange religious cults, or something. Shouldn’t give much trouble.’

‘And who’s doing the arresting:’ asked Ben drily.

‘That’s what the police are for,’ said Sir Charles.

Ben shook his head. ‘That machine will make mince-meat of them in twenty seconds flat!’

‘Then presumably they’ll call in the army. That should take care of this famous machine.’

‘I think we may have got our priorities wrong,’ warned the Doctor. ‘It’s possible there may be more than one machine.’

‘You can bet there are,’ said Ben. ‘They way they’re organised they’ll be building those things all over the place!’

‘We don’t know where they might be,’ went on the Doctor. ‘It wouldn’t be possible to find them all by noon tomorrow...’

‘What do you suggest?’

‘We should strike at the heart of this matter. We should see what we can do to incapacitate Wotan.’

‘That won’t be necessary, I’m sure,’ said Sir Charles huffily. ‘As far as I can see there is no link-up between Professor Brett’s magnificent project and this wretched War Machine story.’

‘No link-up!’ Ben jumped up. ‘Cripes! What more do you need? And what about Polly?’

‘That’s quite enough from you, young man!’ Sir Charles got up angrily to go. ‘I’ll handle things my own way, if you don’t mind.’ He strode out.

‘What’s he going to do?’ asked Ben.

The Doctor shook his head thoughtfully. ‘I’m afraid we may have upset him, Ben. The official mind can take in only so much at a time. We will have to do all we can ourselves.’

The Doctor was already hurrying from the room. Ben raced after him.

## 9

## Attack and Defence

Sir Charles had decided not to take any risks. If there were any truth in this story, then he was certainly going to cover himself.

He and the Commissioner had a brief but effective conference. The affair had to be played down, but in case some lunatics were playing games, it was best to be cautious. They used the old-boy network to bring in – with as little fuss as possible – elements of the armed forces.

‘Call it a special manoeuvre or something,’ advised Sir Charles.

The citizens of London were unaware of what was going on when the streets leading to Covent Garden were closed off to both traffic and pedestrians. People who lived in the district were evacuated. ‘In their own interests... Won’t be for long... Situation being investigated... Probably everyone will be back before tea.’

But there was some surprise to see a number of armoured vehicles moving through the streets, and to catch sight of tanks converging on the centre of London.

Military personnel diverted the traffic. ‘Sorry, sir. Don’t know what the problem is... All traffic turn down towards the Embankment.’ It was a minor irritation, but not a matter of great concern.

‘Nice work,’ agreed Sir Charles. ‘Play it down.’

He and an army captain were sheltering with the Commissioner under the arcades of the market.

Preparations had been carried out quickly and efficiently.

A system of communication had been set up, with an effective headquarters in one corner of Covent Garden.

A number of soldiers were already patrolling the area, keeping in touch with their walkie-talkie radios. After a discussion the captain had set up a machine-gun position to cover the entrance to the warehouse. Sir Charles prayed that the whole affair didn't turn out to be a complete fiasco.

The Captain and Commissioner pored over a map on a field table. 'We don't want anyone slipping away down some back street,' said the Commissioner. 'Not after bringing us out like this.'

A sergeant came in with a radar chart. 'We've checked these bearings, sir,' he told the Captain. 'Seems they intersect here.'

They showed the chart to Sir Charles. 'We've taken a fix on the electronic signal we've been getting,' explained the Captain. 'It looks as though it's definitely from that building... That's this warehouse, isn't it, Sir Charles?'

He had to agree... Confound it! Perhaps something was going on in there, after all!

The Captain checked through a batch of signals.

'There's a whole lot of radio and electronic activity being picked up from there. Any idea what it is, Sir Charles?'

'I'm given to understand there's a large store of explosives.'

'That can't be it,' said the Captain.

'And there's talk of a dangerous War Machine undergoing tests in there... though how much truth there is in that I don't know.'

'Who's in there?'

'We don't know that, either.'

'Well, they won't get for anyhow,' said the Captain.

'We've got platoons covering the back of the building, and my lads are at each end of the Market, covering roads in and out.'

‘We’d better see what’s going on,’ suggested Sir Charles.

‘How about sending in some of your men?’

‘It’s all arranged, sir,’ said the Captain. ‘There’s a squad standing by. Just give us the word, and they’ll go in and have a look round.’

Sir Charles hesitated. The affair had turned out to be more serious than he had expected. That old Doctor fellow had been close to the mark in some of the things he had predicted. He hoped that he wasn’t going to be right about everything. ‘This might be a little more dangerous than one thinks,’ he said.

The Captain remained cheerful. ‘My lads can handle it.’

‘Very well,’ said Sir Charles. ‘If you’re ready we’ll go ahead.’

‘Right, Sergeant,’ called out the Captain. ‘This is it.

Stage one... let them know.’

The sergeant spoke over his field radio. ‘Calling Orange patrol... calling Orange patrol... Your objective number one... Reconnoitre and report... Repeat... Report before taking any further action. Go ahead... Out.’

Orange patrol was led by a corporal, but they were in good hands. He had had active service in a couple of rough spots in his time, and his men had confidence in him.

They followed him into the little yard that flanked the building.

‘Orange patrol calling,’ the corporal reported over his transmitter. ‘No sign of anyone in the area... There’s a door ahead. Goes into the main building... Do we go in?’

‘Do they go in?’ the Captain asked Sir Charles.

‘Can’t see why not,’ said Sir Charles.

The Captain took up the transmitter. ‘Go through the entire building. Take your time. You never know what you might run into, so be ready for anything.’

‘Proceeding as instructed,’ said the Corporal. He pushed open the door. It wasn’t locked, and that somehow seemed a good sign. The rest of his party followed him into the little corridor that lay beyond. It

was dark, but that didn't present any problems. It was also very quiet. The Corporal had been given to understand that there could be quite a number of people in this place... But at this rate it didn't seem likely.

The advantage Major Green had over these military intruders was that he was able to watch their approach – in fact, their every action – on the instruments on the panel before him. He whispered into a microphone beside him and his voice was picked up by no one except the War Machine – silent and motionless – at his side.

'They are twenty-three metres from us. Eleven men in the short corridor... They are armed but only with current weapons...' He seemed to be getting a message for he nodded. 'I understand... No one is to move... They are to be allowed in...'

The Corporal could see little point in wasting time, but he was cautious... Experience had taught him to be... And he opened the door ahead as gently as though it might be a booby-trap.

A stack of crates had been piled up on the other side of the door, and there was no way of seeing what was beyond them until the entire squad was in the room. Then the crates collapsed and the warehouse lay before them, a massive workshop, packed with men and women who looked at them with blank hostility... The air smelt of smoke, chemicals, hot metals... The noise that broke out stunned them, but most of all they were staggered to see the huge, heavily-plated piece of machinery, grotesquely resembling a man – a deformed primitive man – which turned blinding rays of light on them, as though from its eyes, and which generated a strange and increasingly threatening sound from within. It reached a pitch at which it began to move forward... to drive over debris, plunging through the crowd in its path... There was no mistaking its quarry. The thing was bearing down on them... a tank of sorts... terrifying in its shape and size...

'Warning! Warning!' shouted the Major. 'The intruders are here!'

'Strike a light!' The Corporal felt he was rooted to the spot. 'It's real!'

The War Machine rolled forward.

'Attack!' shouted the Major. 'Destroy the strangers!

They are our enemy. None must escape! Cover all exits...

Stand aside... Test fire... Test fire!'

The heavy arms of the Machine swung upwards. The Corporal saw it coming and moved fast. ‘Knock it out, lads! All you’ve got!’ He was the first to fire, his automatic spraying across the metallic body. He might as well have tossed paper-bags at it. The machine drove through the hail of bullets – oblivious, totally unaffected – and closed in on them.

‘Fire at the lights. Fire at its eyes!’ shouted the Corporal.

They sent a burst of fire at the head of the Machine.

It increased speed and plunged on towards them.

The nearest of the squad dropped his gun and ran.

The Machine towered above them as it fired its strangely-shaped gun. A staccato flicker of light sprayed across the room. One of the soldiers screamed as he went down. Nerves cracked all of a sudden. Orange patrol scrambled to find safety.

They were thrown back by the encircling crowd.

Fighting spilled out all around the Corporal.

‘No one may escape!’ repeated the Major.

The sound of gunfire was heard across the Market outside.

‘What on earth’s going on?’ demanded Sir Charles.

‘I don’t understand. I gave clear instructions. No further action...’ The Captain snatched up the transminer. ‘Hello, Orange patrol... hello, Orange patrol... Do you read me?’

‘What’s the situation?’ The Commissioner hurried to join them.

‘I can’t raise them,’ the Captain told him.

All three men turned as an armoured truck raced across the open space. It stopped beside them and the Doctor and Ben climbed out.

‘Well, Sir Charles... What progress has been made?’

‘We don’t know for sure,’ said Sir Charles stiffly.

The sound of shots echoed from the warehouse.

‘Who’s in there?’ asked the Doctor.

‘One of my patrols,’ the Captain told him.

There was chaos in the building, The Corporal guessed their only chance was to create total confusion. He shouted to his squad to fire in every direction as they dodged through the crowd that tried to pen them in, sending burst after burst at the Machine. It was a huge, soulless cat, cornering a handful of mice.

But it was a losing battle and the Corporal knew it.

Bullets had no effect on the monster, and numbers were stacked against them. It was each man for himself as the squad scattered. Some of the men, the newcomers to his troop, began to panic. And he didn’t blame them. There was no battle training which prepared a man for a contest like this. And the Machine was now firing its terrifying light gun faster than an automatic. It was careless who was in range. Some of the hostile crowd went down before it, as did his own lads.

He found himself with his back to the wall a couple of feet from the main door. The Machine focused on him. It powered in, swinging the gun towards him.

The Corporal made a dash for safety, grateful to see a couple of his own men tumble out after him into the daylight of the Square.

They turned and fired back into the building before running for cover.

The Corporal was shaking, unable to take proper aim as his Captain joined him.

‘Corporal! What the devil do you think you’re doing?’

‘In there, sir!’ The Corporal couldn’t take his eyes off the open door. ‘It wiped us out, sir!’

The Captain saw nothing. The shooting had stopped.

‘There’s nothing there, Corporal.’

‘In there, sir.’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘The Machine, sir.’ His eyes were wide with alarm.

‘Machine?’ The Captain peered across the road.

Ben moved in beside them. ‘Like I said,’ he told the Captain. ‘Now perhaps some of our leaders will take things seriously.’

There was a rattle of fire from the two soldiers who had followed the Corporal. They were crouched behind one of the market arches, covering the warehouse door.

‘Tell those men to hold their fire,’ shouted Sir Charles.

‘Cease fire!’ the Captain called.

Sir Charles picked up the loud-hailer. ‘Listen to me...

whoever you are in there. You are surrounded by troops and artillery. You have no chance of getting away. If you have arms, throw them down and come out with your hands in the air.’

There was no response.

Smoke blew across the open doorway. It was too dark to see whether anything was happening inside. All was silent within.

The Doctor looked on helplessly; he had already guessed what was about to happen, and there was no way of stopping it now.

Smoke drifted aside, a puff of wind cleared the front of the warehouse. Someone, or something, appeared to be moving just beyond. Perhaps they really were going to give up.

Those who had never seen the War Machine, those who had no conception of its existence, were shocked as it came into the open. An air of arrogance seemed to invest it... For a few seconds no one moved. The sight stunned them.

‘Take cover!’ shouted the Doctor.

The Machine was carefully circling its arms in a wide sweep. There was no gunfire, only a dull explosion, the impact of something soft. A stream of light played over the watching troops.

Someone screamed. Part of the crowd collapsed like a row of cards.

‘Stop that machine!’ Sir Charles commanded.

Ben dragged him to the ground as the lights swept towards them.

‘Destroy it!’ shouted the Commissioner.

‘Open fire!’ The Captain snatched up an automatic.

From every direction a hail of shots rained against the metal body. Bullets were like flies. The Machine ignored them, moving forward into the centre of the Market Square.

‘Heading this way,’ called Ben.

Nothing withstood it. The troops fell back, dropping to the ground as the lights caught them.

The Doctor had seenits eyes blink when it first came into daylight, but now it had adjusted, and lurched across the road.

‘Keep firing!’ shouted the Captain.

The shooting around him had stopped.

‘Fire, man! Fire!’ he yelled at the Corporal.

‘No use, sir... Gun’s jammed.’

He checked the squad around him. ‘They’ve all jammed, sir.’

The Captain looked blankly at the approaching Machine. Did it have the capacity to jam their guns? What else could be done?

‘We’ll have to pull out,’ he said.

‘We can’t leave,’ Sir Charles was firm. ‘We can’t let this thing loose on London.’

The Captain had one more option. ‘Bring up the mortars!’ he ordered his sergeant.

The Corporal lobbed a hand-grenade at the Machine. It blew a hole in the road.

Another went off beside it, but from then on grenades just rolled harmlessly at its base...

‘They don’t go off, sir,’ said the Sergeant. ‘It must have some way of neutralising them.’

So its defence mechanism had acted at speed, forming neutralising

power within seconds.

‘No joy, sir,’ said the Sergeant. ‘We’re going to have to back off.’

No one had noticed the Doctor in the turmoil of the moment. But now he was seen standing in the midst of the smoke and noise, directly in the path of the Machine, showing no signs of retreating.

‘Doctor!’ Ben was appalled. ‘Get back!’

‘What’s the old man doing?’ demanded the Captain.

‘He’ll get himself killed!’

The Doctor had a radio transmitter hanging on a strap round his neck. With one hand he was adjusting the power and volume, and in the other he carried what looked like an old paint tin.

‘He must be out of his mind!’

The firing stopped.

The Machine seemed to hesitate as it changed its aim.

The speed at which it had moved slowed down. It looked as though it had run out of oil.

Those closest to the Doctor detected an oscillation coming from the radio, or perhaps the tin. Perhaps the onlookers read too much into the Machine’s behaviour, but many said a look of alarm filled its eye-sockets, and the War Machine came to a stop.

## 10

## Taking to the Streets

Every television and radio station halted programmes to broadcast the latest news flash. The population was reassured that the incident was under control.

‘Here is the latest bulletin on the London emergency.’

The warnings were relayed to public buildings, homes, and places of entertainment. All citizens were to be on them guard.

The newsreader continued: ‘It was announced a few minutes ago that the object which has been described as a

"War Machine", and which terrorised the Covent Garden district of London this morning, has been successfully put out of action.'

Film of the area – the warehouse, the bullet marks on the walls – were shown on the screen. 'The city responded with characteristic calm in this emergency. As yet there has been no satisfactory explanation for this attack. The instigators are not known, and no group has claimed to be behind the action.'

Later the newsreader reappeared on screen. 'An emergency meeting of the Cabinet was held at Number Ten, Downing Street an hour ago, and the Service chiefs were called to attend..

At that moment a paper was passed to the newsreader, who read it aloud. 'The Ministry of Defence have just issued the following statement: "Further attacks of a similar nature are to be expected in the Metropolitan area in the next twenty-four hours".'

A final warning was issued to the public. 'The army are standing by at key centres. People are warned to stay indoors, and to remain calm.'

The news was received with a certain amount of scepticism.

The army acted quickly and efficiently, loading the Machine and removing it to the laboratory of one of London's research institutions.

There it lay on a large table, surrounded by instruments requested by the Doctor. He had arrived with the 'body', and now hovered over it, dismembering it piece by piece, analysing, noting, tabulating, scrutinising it, section by section.

'You should have been a surgeon, shouldn't you, Doc,'

suggested Ben, who was watching at his shoulder. But he didn't stay long. He had to search that warehouse himself before believing Polly wasn't there. He slipped away leaving the Doctor to his task.

Assistants clustered round, but they were out of their depth as the workings were revealed. The technology was something they had not experienced.

'Remarkable,' said the Doctor. 'Truly admirable.' He seemed able to appreciate the ingenuity with which the War Machine had been developed.

'Damn dangerous, if you ask me,' muttered the Commissioner.

The little group round the table parted as Sir Charles joined them, ushering in a stranger.

'The Minister would like to know what you have decided, Doctor,' said Sir Charles.

'I am anxious to learn what caused the mechanism to break down,' said the Minister.

'That I can tell you.' The Doctor looked up from his dissection. 'This is in fact a computer. And no matter how sophisticated it is – and this one is very advanced indeed –

it is still basically a computer... And, I imagine, brought into action rather earlier than intended.'

'Because it had to be!' said Sir Charles in triumph.

'Because we launched our attack!'

'But you brought it to an abrupt stop, Doctor,' said the Minister. 'After gun-fire had no effect.'

'A burnt-out circuit,' explained the Doctor.

'But what caused that?'

'Very simply an electro-magnetic pulse, generated by a radio wave, causing an overload. It could also be done by micro-waves. A charge of electro-magnetic energy.' The Doctor indicated the stricken heap of electronics on the table before him. 'One might say I gave him a heart attack.'

The Minister wasn't sure whether he understood. 'Does that mean that if there are any more of these machines in existence we can deal with them in the same way?'

'By no means,' said the Doctor. 'The first grenade exploded – so did the second. But the computer had reacted to that new experience in a matter of seconds and developed an immunity before the third grenade was thrown... The same thing will happen with this approach of mine. Believe me, the next War Machine – if it ever gets onto the streets of London – will not be so easily disposed of.'

'What do we have to do, then? How are we to deal with this threat?'

'We must locate any other such devices at once, and destroy them

before they destroy your city.'

Tracking down other workshops where War Machines might be in the process of construction, was beyond the ability of the authorities. The warnings went out: police, security, the services, were all thrown into the search.

There was a score of false alarms, but nothing was found.

London was a vast city. There was little hope for a quick success.

But construction of Wotan's War Machines was in progress, and at full pressure: in out-of-the-way back streets, in disused factories, in empty buildings, in the back yards of little engineering firms, even in garages.

In each such place, gangs of workmen and women laboured until they dropped as they tried desperately to meet a deadline – to complete the task set them before noon that day. And in all cases they had managed to keep pace with the clock. It was a super-human effort in every sense.

Not far from the dock area, in a disused repair shop littered with wrecks of old vehicles, a team was racing to put the finishing touches to the Machine.

The leader of the workers checked the Machine before contacting headquarters.

'Central Control,' he called. 'We have completed the first stage, and are reporting as instructed. Permission to turn on power.'

Brett's voice came back over the receiver. 'Permission granted. Carry out the switch-on. Stand by for testing.

There must be no mistakes. The disaster of Covent Garden will not be tolerated... You understand?'

'Message understood.'

'Very well... Switch on.'

The leader showed no emotion as he crossed to the War Machine standing in the repair shop, surrounded by the exhausted crowd of workers.

He turned a small switch in what might be the nape of the short

neck... and the effect was instantaneous. Lights glowed in the eye positions, a tremor ran through the entire structure – it was as though blood had started to flow in a living body, and the Machine was coming to life.

The massive head turned slowly to take in its first view of those who had created it.

Ben hurried back to the Doctor.

'I've been through the whole place, Doctor... There's no sign of Polly.'

'Don't worry, my boy. She'll turn up.'

He couldn't understand how the old man could be so calm about it!

'But she was there! I saw her. Everyone else had been accounted for.'

'I'm afraid I have no time to talk about Polly now,' said the Doctor. He was absorbed in a mass of internal parts, the circuits of the dissected mechanism before him.

He was surrounded by an anxious group. 'What progress, Doctor?' asked the Minister. 'Does it make any sense?'

The Doctor nodded. 'I think I have decoded the programme mechanism. It has a complex programme built into it, a highly specialised knowledge. It has to be aware of its function in co-operation with other such Machines.'

'But what exactly does that mean?'

'If I'm right, this is one with eleven other machines –

making twelve in all – which are being built in and around London, within a radius of twenty miles... There is a timing device... here... which feeds into the computer system. By my calculations all twelve machines are programmed to go into action at twelve o'clock today.'

There was a shocked silence.

'Twelve o'clock!' The Minister was appalled. 'Eleven other machines like this!' He looked helplessly at the Doctor. 'What can we possibly do?'

It was Brett's voice that came over the air, sounding through the old repair shop.

‘Each War Machine is known by an individual name.

This is Valk, the second to be created and incorporating advanced features. After this final testing, Valk will be ready to make his own decisions – always conforming to the over-all plan devised by Wotan.’

The eye-sockets glowed brighter, seeming to flash angry signals. The Machine appeared to rouse itself, shaking off an invisible restraint. It was like an animal on a leash.

‘Turn left!’ ordered Brett.

The Machine obeyed. It was taking instructions – not from this human being whose voice all could hear – but from another computer which had designed it: Wotan.

‘Turn right... Move forward...’

The Machine moved slowly through the crowd. It gave the impression of testing its own strength, stretching its limbs, sensing its power. It had about it an air of independence, an almost casual way of moving, that hinted at a contempt for all things – not just human things.

‘Halt!’ ordered Brett. ‘This is your basic function. You must be ready to go into attack when given the order.

There are to be no mistakes. The next series of tests will reinforce disciplines... For co-operation in attack... Valk is to move towards the exit... Continue until instructed to stop..

The Machine moved towards the doors, its head turning slowly, eyes lighting up the corners of the room. It was clearly searching for something, as it hesitated. To one side stood the receiver/transmitter over which Brett’s voice issued instructions. It was a good five or six yards from the door, but the Machine turned in its tracks and headed for it. ‘You are to continue to the exit,’ Brett’s voice came loudly.

Valk ignored him, neither slowing down nor increasing speed, merely ploughing on at its own steady pace towards the bank of instruments. Then, raising its heavy arms, it brought them down with a crash on the equipment.

‘You are to obey...’ Brett’s voice was cut short. The floor was littered with the instruments’ remains. Valk swept them aside, and pushed open the repair shop doors.

The situation was incomprehensible. Brett spoke in a bewildered whisper. ‘We have been cut off. The Machine has destroyed all communication!’

A wave of pulses flowed through Wotan. Krimpton felt as though he himself were fighting for breath.

‘A fault in the programming,’ he said lamely. ‘We must correct it.’

The Captain reported back to Sir Charles.

‘We’ve been through the entire warehouse, sir. Rounded everyone up.’

‘Did they give any trouble?’

‘None at all. They looked to me as though they’d been brain-washed. I’ve brought one chap along. I thought you might like to ask him a few questions.’ ‘Bring him in,’ said Sir Charles.

The Doctor looked up from his examination as the Captain signalled to his men at the door.

A man was led in.

‘Major Green!’ The Doctor greeted him cheerfully.

‘You know him, Doctor?’ asked the Minister.

‘Of course!’ He turned to the Major. ‘You remember me, don’t you, Major?’

The Major passed a hand over his face. ‘No, I’m sorry...

I don’t seem able to remember anything.’

‘But you know where you are?’ suggested the Doctor.

The Major looked round. He shook his head. ‘What is this place?’

‘So... you don’t know where you are? Suppose I said Covent Garden. Would that mean anything?’

‘Of course. The market.’

The Doctor nodded. He pointed to the bits and pieces on the table – sections of the War Machine... ‘But you can tell us quite a bit about this?’ suggested the Doctor.

The Major was startled. ‘Good lord! What is it?’

‘Thank you, gentlemen.’ The Doctor waved a hand.

‘You can take him away... He will probably require medical help.’

As the Major was led out, Sir Charles looked on doubtfully. ‘How do you know he’s telling the truth?’

‘I’m certain of it.’ The Doctor was already back at work.

‘The fellow remembers nothing since he was absorbed into Brett’s computer system.’

‘You seem very positive about that.’

‘I am,’ the Doctor agreed.

‘Well, if Brett is at the root of this business, the sooner we get into the Post Office Tower the better,’ said Sir Charles firmly.

‘And what are you going to do there?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Arrest him, of course!’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘Very dangerous. That sort of strong-arm method will only land us in more trouble.’

‘I strongly resent–’ Sir Charles began, but the Minister interrupted: ‘What do you suggest, Doctor?’

The Doctor was probing the computer circuits at the back of the War Machine. ‘It’s going to be difficult,’ he admitted.

It would not have been possible for Valk to move through the streets of London – not even in the back alleys behind the deserted dock areas–without creating panic. People fled at the sight of him. Phones were jammed. Police stations were flooded with calls from a terrified public.

‘I’ve just seen it! One of them things they warned us about on the telly! It’s walking! Out therein the street!

Smashing anything in its way!’

Warnings went out over the air. ‘A second War Machine has been seen. Keep off the streets. Under no circumstances must it be

approached or challenged. Phone your local police if you have anything to report. Further bulletins will be issued.'

Ben watched the Doctor at work. The old man was absorbed in dissecting the mass of electronics that was once a War Machine. Of course it was important to find out what made it tick, but Ben couldn't forget Polly. If only the Doctor could do something to help her!

'If they're building more of these things, then they could have switched her to one of the other workshops,' he said. 'She could be helping them to put together another blooming monster somewhere else!'

'My dear boy.' The Doctor didn't even look up. 'If we start worrying about one person we'll never solve anything.'

Ben turned grimly to the sergeant at the door. 'And he looks such a kind old bloke, doesn't he?'

'He's enough on his hands already, mate,' said the sergeant.

'Maybe,' said Ben, 'but that little duchess saved my life.

She could be in bad trouble.'

A trail of wreckage littered the streets behind Valk. He seemed to take a special delight in destruction, mighty arms smashing every obstacle. A parked car was beaten to the ground, a sweeper's barrow finished up as a heap of splinters. Terrified groups watched from street corners, racing away in panic as the Machine lurched towards them.

A woman screamed; a metal fist shattered glass as she ran.

A child with an ice-cream would have been pulverised had not a man dashed out to drag him to safety.

Valk shambled through London and the watching populace was stunned.

Police and military were in constant touch with Sir Charles.

'It's moving through Battersea, heading for the power station. There's been appalling destruction... We can't delay any longer. I suggest troops open fire,' said Sir Charles.

'That will get you nowhere,' said the Doctor. 'You saw what happened in Covent Garden.'

‘But we have to do something or we’ll have a full-scale panic on our hands.’

‘Shooting will make things worse.’ The Doctor was firm.

‘Then what do you suggest?’ asked the Minister.

‘We have one chance,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully.

‘But for that we must get hold of another of these machines.’

‘Get hold of it!’

‘Exactly...’

Professor Brett and Krimpton worked flat out. There were adjustments to make... The indiscipline that Valk had shown had to be corrected. None of the other War Machines would be switched on until the fault was found.

Wotan must be the final source of power and authority.

The flaw in the computer that had allowed Valk to defy Wotan was located... It was a race against time.

They were startled as the door to Brett’s office opened and Polly walked in... More defiance? Another failure?

‘Why are you here?’

‘I submit myself to Wotan’s judgement.’ She spoke in an odd, stilted fashion. ‘I helped to set free a prisoner.’

‘Wotan will consider this later,’ said Brett. ‘If guilty you will be destroyed.’

‘I understand.’

‘But now your help is needed. Check the instruments as we make these tests.’

Polly went obediently to her desk.

The Doctor explained his plan to the assembly. ‘There is no point in attacking from without. Our chance is to paralyse from within.’

He demonstrated, pointing to the Machine laid out on the table before

him. ‘This section houses the control unit.

It can only be approached from the back of the structure...

and it is electronically controlled.’

He had to break off as a flurry of reports arrived.

The Minister looked up. ‘We don’t have much time, Doctor.’

‘Then I shall want equipment to create a powerful magnetic field... Sufficient to operate from twenty feet.’

‘Twenty feet from what, Doctor?’

‘From the Machine we are about to capture.’

There was a moment of silence.

‘Won’t that be dangerous?’

‘Very,’ said the Doctor.

‘And if it fails?’

‘Do you have any other suggestions, gentlemen?’ asked the Doctor.

**11**

**Setting the Trap**

The Minister and Sir Charles came out of their conference with the Service chiefs. Decisions had been made. They rejoined the Doctor. ‘Where do you want this equipment?’

‘Where was the Machine last sighted?’ he asked.

They had a map of the area on the wall. Sir Charles indicated the trail Valk had taken. ‘Just about here when last reported,’ he said.

The Doctor examined the map. ‘If you were able to block off this street... and this... and this... the Machine would come down here.’

They saw what he was planning.

‘I see,’ the Minister nodded. ‘So it comes down here...’

‘And with any luck...’ said the Doctor. But he didn’t finish the

sentence.

The organisation was carried out at speed. The streets were empty; no traffic held up the army as they carried out the trap this white-headed old man had suggested. Few hoped for much. The idea was hare-brained, but no one had come up with another idea.

A shelter had been hurriedly put up just beyond the point where the Doctor proposed to spring his trap. Inside crowded a number of technicians, quickly assembling a piece of equipment. It involved dragging heavy cables across the street, forming three sides of a square.

Sir Charles looked on. 'I don't see how this is going to work,' he said gloomily.

'Simple,' said the Doctor. 'We shall set up a magnetic field of great force around the Machine. It will be enclosed as though in a box.'

'You have only three cables,' said Sir Charles.

'We have a fourth standing by.'

'I can't see it stepping into your box so conveniently.'

The Doctor nodded. 'For that reason the cables are hidden at the side of the street, and the fourth cable will not come into play until the creature... the Machine.. has moved into position.'

'H'mm.' Sir Charles was not impressed.

'Then the current will be switched on,' added the Doctor.

'How do you close the box?'

'I shall take the fourth cable and connect it to the others.'

'With that monster just a few feet away! Impossible.'

'It's a risk,' the Doctor admitted.

Ben pushed his way forward. 'Bit past that sort of lark, aren't you, Doc?'

The Doctor was indignant. 'I beg your pardon!'

'That's a job for me,' said Ben. 'I'm nippy on my feet.'

There was general assent in spite of the Doctor's protests.

'Right,' said Ben. 'That's settled.'

'How's it going?' called the Minister.

'Fitting the third cable, sir,' called back the Captain.

'Reports coming in, sir... It's a block away.'

'Stand by. Take up positions... Let me know –'

'There it is!' the Captain cut in.

They peered from the shelter. The sight of the strange machine lurching along the deserted streets brought a shocked silence, then one of the technicians whispered to the Doctor, 'Final cable in position, sir.'

The Doctor nodded. It had been a close-run race, and now he would have to put his theory to the test.

Perhaps the watchers read a meaning into the actions of the War Machine – a meaning that was not really there...

but it seemed the thing slowed down as it came in sight of the shelter – it began to move with caution. The huge head turned searchingly from side to side. Did it have some way of sensing danger? Was it aware of the cables hidden at the sides of the road?

Even the Doctor wondered whether it could guess –

could understand– what lay ahead.

But Valk didn't stop, moving slowly down the street, taking as a line of direction the little shelter with the silent group inside.

A wave of fear went through them as they saw the Machine approaching.

'Heading for us,' whispered the Captain.

'Good.' The Doctor was very calm. 'I shall let it come within twenty feet. Don't be alarmed, my friends. When I give the word, Captain, play out the cable. Ben will carry it to the other side of the road and connect it to the cable there.'

‘Understood,’ whispered the Captain. He couldn’t take his eyes off the Machine. It grew more terrifying as it got closer.

‘Now,’ said the Doctor, ‘let’s see just where it is.’

He peered out through a hole in the tarpaulin that covered the shelter.

Valk was about fifty yards away. The lights from the eye positions beamed on the shelter.

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor. ‘Have you noticed, gentlemen, one curious thing about it which is in our favour? For some reason this War Machine is not armed like the other one. I wonder why? Perhaps it is not a finished job. And if not, why not? Very interesting.’

He was caught up in his speculations as the others looked with alarm at Vale’s approach.

‘It’s very near, Doctor. That must be twenty feet.’

‘Oh dear me, no. Nothing like. We don’t want to spring the trap too soon. We’ll only get one chance, you know.’

The technicians operating the switches were sweating.

‘Now, sir?’

‘Hold it a moment,’ insisted the Doctor. He kept an eye on the Machine, measuring distance as best he could.

‘It will be too late,’ whispered Sir Charles.

The Doctor raised a finger for silence. The Machine closed in on them, slowed... stopped... appeared to be making a decision.

‘It’s not in the box,’ whispered the Captain.

‘Can it think? Does it know?’

That was a question the Doctor couldn’t answer.

Ben gripped his arm. ‘It’s on the move, Doc.’

Valk edged forward.

‘Surely, Doctor... surely –’ Sir Charles was convinced the old man would get them all crushed to death. If it made a sudden rush, what

chance...

'Now!' The Doctor threw open the door. Ben raced from the shelter, holding one end of a cable. A team of soldiers played it out behind him.

Be ready to switch on when I give the signal,' said the Doctor.

He saw Valk turn as Ben dragged the cable across the road, and he guessed it was about to follow.

'Distraction!' shouted the Doctor. He left the shelter, waving his arms.

Ben struggled to make the connection. It was best not to look round as the War Machine took a couple of heavy steps. Which way was it going? Well, he'd have to risk it...

One more effort to drag the two cables together – to slot them into...

'Right!' shouted Ben.

The Doctor threw up his hand. 'Switch on!'

There was a blinding flash.

The War Machine was bearing down on them. It stopped in its tracks.

For a moment it looked as though it were about to break what invisible chains held it... Then the whole thing seemed to suffer a spasm, and baleful eyes were fixed on the Doctor as he approached it.

'Well done!' called Sir Charles. He was about to hurry out.

'Stay where you are, Sir Charles,' said the Doctor. 'This shouldn't take a moment.'

He strolled towards Valk, braving the glare, the look of destructive venom, it gave him.

As he stood alongside, the huge machine did its utmost to bring down its raised arms on his head. In fact, they moved about an inch, then seized up.

'Temper, temper!' scolded the Doctor. He was at the back of the Machine, busily locating the centre panel. It was designed exactly like the machine he had taken to pieces, and he was able to unscrew the section.

The watchers looked on in hope and fear, but the Doctor didn't appear in the least concerned. 'Well, well...

Fancy that... That's an improvement, but for such an advanced computer... Just as I thought.' He tinkered with the mechanism. No one could quite see what he was doing, then he called, 'That's it, gentlemen. You can switch off now.'

It was a moment of doubt... What would the War Machine do when it was freed from the electronic grip?

The hum of the dynamo ceased as the switch was turned. The eyes still beamed with an alarming glow... but Valk didn't move, and the little crowd breathed again.

'What did you do?' they wanted to know.

'To coin a phrase, I neutralised it,' said the Doctor cheerfully.

They gathered round, looking up at the Machine, still fearsome, still frightening.

'Quite a friendly fellow when you get to know him,'

added the Doctor.

Ben joined them from the other side of the street.

'Good-looking chap,' said Ben admiringly. 'What's the next step, Doc?'

'Just one or two adjustments to his character. After all, there are few of us who couldn't do with a little improvement.'

The news flashed round London, and from thereto the rest of the watching world. New York had followed the action, step by step on television and radio. 'News from London confirms the capture of the second War Machine. It has been made safe. But the big question is... How many more of these machines are there? Where are they? Is this a threat to the peace of the world? Or is it confined to the United Kingdom?' This was followed by a warning. The disturbing fact is that each of these machines has given evidence of great improvements. If this development continues there may be no way of coping with later super-models. We watch and wait with great concern.'

It seemed to Sir Charles and the little group that surrounded the Doctor as he busied himself with the internal parts of Valk, that he

was allowing scientific interest to blind him to the desperate urgency of the situation. ‘Time is running short, Doctor. You said yourself that the rest of these machines are to be let loose on London by noon.’

‘Yes... yes... quite.’ The Doctor fumbled with the internal workings of his captive.

‘What’s he doing?’ the Minister asked anxiously.

‘I haven’t a clue,’ said Sir Charles, ‘but we’re in his hands.’

‘And how does he propose to resist this attack?’

Sir Charles shook his head. ‘Can’t get a word of sense out of the chap...’ he began.

The Doctor snapped back the outer section and was screwing Valk together. ‘There he is!’

‘You have finished, Doctor?’

‘Yes, gentlemen. And now I think you will find our friend a changed character.’

‘And how have you done that?’

‘A simple matter,’ smiled the Doctor. ‘A matter of retraining – or, in this case, reprogramming.’

‘And this will solve the problem, will it?’ asked Sir Charles. ‘I mean, you think we will now be able to cope with any further monsters?’

‘There’s only one way of finding out,’ said the Doctor.

‘Stand back, everyone.’

He reached up and tumed a switch on the Machine’s neck.

It came to life with alarming force, as terrifying as before.

‘It’s all right, gentlemen. You’re quite safe, I assure you.

If we weren’t, would I be standing here?’

Valk was moving alongside the Doctor as he crossed towards the group.

‘If you say so, Doc.’ Ben took a deep breath and joined him.

Valk followed at their heels. ‘Good dog,’ grinned Ben.

‘Come along, Fido.’

Confidence grew. ‘Extraordinary... Marvellous...’ The old fellow had done the impossible!

‘You must tell us, Doctor. Exactly what did you do?’

‘Some other time,’ said the Doctor. ‘We have urgent business.’

And as the Doctor strode away Valk lumbered after him.

The amazement of the onlookers was undisguised. It was a brief moment of relief. Perhaps the Doctor could be forgiven a slightly smug smile.

Ben hurried after him.

‘Right, Doc,’ he said. ‘You wanted to get hold of this little beauty. You’ve got him... How are you going to use him?’

The Doctor was thoughtful. ‘I don’t think you were around when Dodo and I first came into contact with this problem.’

‘When was that?’

‘When we visited this famous Tower London has built.’

‘The G.P.O. Tower?’

‘Correct. That’s where the trouble began... At least, that’s where we first came across it.’

‘That’s a very respectable landmark,’ said Ben. ‘I can’t see much harm coming out of the good old Post Office.

Part of the Establishment, isn’t it?’

The Doctor ignored him. ‘The problem had its origins in Professor Brett’s office. And if I’m not mistaken, it will probably end there.’

Ben wasn’t sure he understood. ‘There’s one other problem,’ he said.

‘What’s that, my boy?’

‘Polly,’ said Ben firmly. ‘What about her?’

‘I’m afraid time is too short to check on her just now,’

the Doctor told him.

‘She could be anywhere,’ protested Ben. ‘She could be in real trouble.’

‘We have a deadline,’ said the Doctor.

‘A deadline?’

‘Which we cannot miss.’

‘What deadline?’

‘Midday today,’ said the Doctor. ‘If my reading of the programming is correct, then the other War Machines are to be activated simultaneously at that hour. If that happens I don’t see how we could be capable of containing ten or eleven such destructive mechanisms once launched against this city.’

‘But Polly...’

‘Priorities, you understand,’ said the Doctor.

‘Listen,’ persisted Ben. ‘You say we’ve got till mid-day...

Right... Give me till then.’

‘What can you do?’

‘I can try to find her.’

‘But where?’

‘Like you said – probably at the heart of the problem.

Where it all started.’

‘No, my boy. I don’t recommend... Ben! Ben! Where are you going?’

‘Don’t start anything till the deadline, Doc,’ called Ben as he hurried away.

‘Wait a moment... You can do nothing... Her best chance...’

But Ben had disappeared round a corner at speed. He was clearly

heading for the area of the P.O. Tower.

The Doctor frowned. This was a complication he could well have done without, but the vagaries of young people were always a hazard... One that constantly surprised him.

'The foolish boy,' he muttered.

## 12

## The Showdown

The loss of the War Machine at Covent Garden was an undeniable setback, but it had served only to spur Wotan to greater activity. The organisation became even more effective and productive. The schedule for completion of the other War Machines was fulfilled step by step, and each step was dead on time. One setback had put pressure on all dedicated to this historic endeavour. They knew it was the last chance to save this universe from the incompetent and illogical way in which humanity was controlling its destiny. Once in the hands of the Machines, with all the advantages that Computers could bring, then the future would be safe, and life – their new type of 'life' – would flourish for ever.

But the real shock was with the defection of Valk. That was more than a hiccup, and Wotan had gone into a state of turbulence. It hadn't lasted. Wotan was no human being with a nervous system that could be overwhelmed by despair or any other emotion. Almost immediately the circuits were producing answers to the problems caused by Valk... Obviously there was a flaw in the composition of the control element that bound Valk to the rest of the War Machines and to Wotan. In some way Valk had failed to come under proper central discipline. It could have been said that he had a mind of his own... That was a fault that had to be repaired immediately... and it was. No other War Machine would be able to make decisions contrary to those imposed by Wotan and the central plan. The problem was solved. The incident was over. The other Machines were on the point of completion. They would all be ready as planned for the moment of general attack.

Wotan could see no other obstacle to the ultimate success of his campaign. And such opinions were expressed through the two human mouthpieces with him in his headquarters, the offices of Professor Brett and Krimpton had got the programme back on course.

'All is ready,' said Krimpton. 'Standing by for the word of command.'

‘Last instructions are being fed into programmes,’ said Brett. They were both eager to go. Perhaps the anxiety to start the action revealed something of Wotan itself. But the Computer kept all the reins in its own hands, restraining any human enthusiam. This attack was to be handled with total rationality. There were no such things as prayers or hope. Everything boiled down to mathematics – to the logic of forces. And in those terms Wotan had already summed up the odds, and knew that complete victory already was in his grasp.

‘War Machines standing by,’ repeated Krimpton.

Wotan was frustrated by only one thing... his inability to move. But that was a disability that would be attended to as soon as this attack was over.

As it was, he was forced for the time being to make use of these two creatures. They were a disadvantage Wotan would soon be quit of. But they would have served their purposes. And in addition they had failed him in one thing for which Wotan was not prepared to forgive. They had failed to co-opt the one brain he had desperately needed in order to achieve the final glory of the dream... They had failed to enlist, by fair means or foul, that strange, gifted character who had visited this office: the white-haired old man they called ‘the Doctor’. That was a failure that could have cost the Cause much. And both these human servants would have to pay the price.

But all Wotan said – the voice issuing forth, high-pitched, synthetic – was, ‘Orders for the attack will be given only by Wotan.’

The message was implanted into the very foundation of the War Machines, now poised at various points in their workshops round London, dove-tailed for the attack. ‘No attack without instructions from the central Machine, Wotan.’ Valk could never happen again.

As the Doctor had said, time was short, and he had much to do.

As before, he needed the unreserved help of the authorities. This time he got it, for they had already seen what the old man could do when everything else failed.

Sir Charles, the Commissioner, the Service Chiefs, and anyone else he had required, had obeyed his instructions without question. It was only now – when the Doctor appeared to have completed his task – and so much depended on it – that moments of doubt arose. What had he been doing? What exactly was this plan of his?

The Doctor had explained little... He had been too occupied to stop and discuss matters, and when he had, his ideas seemed so odd that no one was sure they understood them correctly.

‘What exactly is going to happen, Doctor?’

Sir Charles had acted as the Doctor’s liaison with the other authorities. He guessed that if things went wrong he’d get the wrath of many down on his head... Although the truth of the matter was that if things went wrong it would be of no importance what anyone said or did. They would all be in the soup. Nothing would survive, as Sir Charles saw it.

‘How will your scheme work?’ he whispered.

They were in his car, parked not far from the Post Office Tower. In fact, they could see it through the front windscreen. Why Sir Charles felt the need to whisper, he couldn’t say. But he dreaded the outcome of events, and didn’t dare put a foot wrong.

‘In a sense it will be rather like the clash of two fields of power. I can’t think of a handy example, but suppose two whirlwinds were to approach each other... or two magnetic fields... or electrical currents...’ The Doctor groped for an explanation. ‘All poor similes,’ he said,‘ for nothing quite like this has happened before. That’s what’s so interesting about it. One cannot be quite sure of the outcome.’

‘What!’ Sir Charles was appalled.

‘One can never be absolutely sure about anything in the world of appearances,’ said the Doctor. ‘There is more to things than the law of cause and effect. There is the

"unpredictable". That, I think, may be our strong point.

The computer, Wotan, is based purely and simply on the precepts of Logic. The "unpredictable" may not come into its calculations. What it may do in response to the unexpected is anybody’s guess.’

Sir Charles was uneasy. He didn’t like this uncertainty.

‘What "unexpected’?’ he asked.

‘Well, for one thing,’ mused the Doctor, ‘how will Wotan respond to the fact that I have armed Valk? Will he have an even stronger answer and blow him out of the ground?’

‘Is that possible?’

‘Oh yes.’

‘And if he does?’ asked Sir Charles.

‘Dear, dear,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘I didn’t really have time to consider that.’ Then he cheered up as he gazed out of the car. ‘Still, one can’t think of everything.’

Sir Charles slumped back.

A moment later he asked, ‘I understand you are arranging some sort of confrontation between the two War Machines?’

‘Precisely,’ agreed the Doctor.

‘And if all goes well... I mean, as planned?’

‘Then I imagine a number of people who have been suffering some form of hypnosis will suddenly snap out of it, so to speak, and become themselves again. Probably quite unable to account for anything that may have taken place over the last few days.’

It wasn’t exactly the answer that Sir Charles had expected, but he said no more.

Both men sat up sharply as a large truck passed them and pulled up close to the entrance of the Tower.

‘Nice timing,’ said the Doctor.

‘Are we expecting this?’ asked Sir Charles.

The Doctor nodded. ‘First step in the confrontation, one might say.’

Sir Charles peered ahead at the parked truck with some anxiety. He couldn’t see exactly what was happening, but a small army of men were at work operating a crane and unloading the one item they had aboard.

A moment later he saw the dreaded figure of Valk standing on the pavement. It seemed uncertain what to do as the truck drove off.

The Doctor spoke into a microphone in the car.

‘Instructions to be followed as planned, Valk. You are to proceed

according to the first pattern. Now!'

The giant figure turned slowly as if to get its bearings.

Sir Charles hoped it was not going to suffer another bout of lawlessness. Perhaps it still had that tendency to do its own thing. It might still have a mind of its own.

But it turned as docilely as a pet dog towards the entrance and lurched forward, one rigid step at a time, into the Tower.

'What's it carrying?' whispered Sir Charles.

'I told you,' said the Doctor. 'Valk is now armed.'

There were moments when Ben asked himself why he was doing this. Why go to so much trouble? After all, he didn't know this girl all that well. He'd met Polly only a few days before. They'd had some pretty sharp exchanges that first evening in 'The Inferno' Club. Admittedly they'd got on very well after that. She was a nice kid for all her scatty ways, and he forgave her for her upper-class attitudes. She couldn't help her background.

But to stick his neck out like this! Even the old Doctor had said it was dangerous, and he seemed to take danger in his stride!

Nevertheless, Ben knew he couldn't back off. He guessed he owed his life to that girl. She had let him escape; she'd got him out of a tough spot. He owed her something in return. If she were in trouble – and he guessed she was – then he had to do what he could. He had a feeling it wouldn't be enough... He was out of his depth in this struggle with these monsters – these War Machines.

If it had been a matter of pitching into some punch-up he would have guaranteed the outcome.. But creeping through the empty and silent corridors of this huge Post Office Tower, looking for some clue as to her whereabouts – this was more than he had reckoned with.

Besides, where was he to start? And where was everybody? Why had the place been cleared? Or was this the place they had recruited the work-force from? That work-force he had seen brain-washed in the warehouse at Covent Garden? He had a feeling that must be the answer.

If they had wanted skilled technicians... He stopped in his tracks!

Somewhere ahead he could hear the sound of voices...

Well, not exactly voices, but one voice – a synthetic sound, high-pitched and metallic. It seemed to come from a corridor that branched off to one side.

He tip-toed down it softly and read the name of the door.

'Professor Brett,' he said softly.

He remembered... That was where Polly worked!

Very gently he pushed open the door.

He couldn't believe his luck! There was Polly, by herself at a desk, in an outer office, thumbing through some papers as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened to her.

'Polly!' he called softly.

She looked up. She didn't seem to be surprised or startled.

'What are you doing here?' she asked flatly.

He could hear men's voices in the next room. And the loud metallic voice dominating them with a volley of instructions.

'Quickly,' he whispered. 'You've got to get out of here.'

'Why do you say that?'

'You're in danger. There's going to be a big bust-up.'

'I don't know what you mean.'

He came into the room and crossed to her. 'Come on, Duchess. We don't have a lot of time.'

She looked at him blankly. Perhaps she didn't really understand.

He glanced at the clock on the wall. It was almost five minutes to midday. She followed his glance.

'At noon the struggle will be over,' she said.

'Well, at least it will have started,' he said grimly, 'and we want to be a long way from here.'

‘It is best to be here for our victory.’

‘Our victory?’ She still had that distant look in her eyes.

If only he could shake her out of it! Make her realise what danger she was in, see the facts as they were! But she was still in this dream-world... this nightmare world... like the rest of that work-force had been.

‘It’s our last chance,’ he told her. He was conscious of every tick of the clock. ‘Mustn’t get jumpy,’ he told himself... But it was hard.

‘Let’s move, Duchess. While the going’s good.’

She shook her head. ‘I work for Wotan,’ she said simply.

He despaired.

‘Don’t be so stupid!’ He grabbed her ann. She tried to pull away, but Ben wasn’t taking any chances. He clapped a hand over her mouth and began to drag her towards the door.

He had the door open when he heard the lift in the corridor. It was on the move... and by the sound of it, on the way up.

He could be dragging the girl into more danger. He let her go and hurried to the end of the corridor, from where he could see the lift entrance. The lift was just coming to a stop.

Ben waited, holding his breath. This could be timely help, or it might be more of the brain-washed crowd to help Wotan.

He felt his jaw drop slightly as the great Machine stepped jerkily from the lift.

Valk!

He had reason to remember every feature of that monster. Maybe it was tamed now... but it certainly didn’t look much different. It still chilled his blood to look at it.

It turned towards him, and Ben quickly pulled back out of sight.

Valk!

What could it be doing here? Why was it on its own?

What had happened to the Doctor?

He had a shattering thought! Yes, what had happened to the Doctor!

He was about to hurry back to the office, but something about Valk caught his attention. The Machine was different in one capacity... It now carried what appeared to be a sawn-off shot-gun, or an automatic rifle...

He took one quick look down the corridor.

He was right.

Valk was armed, and was lurching towards him.

Ben raced back to the office.

He couldn't believe his eyes! Polly had returned to her desk, and was checking her work as before.

He didn't give her time to look up, but grabbed her again and pulled her, kicking and struggling, out of the office.

He made no attempt to silence her as she screamed:

'Leave me! I want to stay! I must do what I can for Wotan!'

'Don't worry, Duchess,' he said grimly. 'We'll find you another cushy job.'

She snatched at the door-handle and clung onto it. She made every step of the way as difficult as possible.

'Wotan! Wotan!' she shouted.

He jerked her away from the door. 'If you ask me,' said Ben, 'old Wotan is on the way out. He's running out of time... with a power leak.' He was dragging her down the short corridor. He wanted to get her to the main corridor before Valk showed up... After that, he guessed anything might happen. He'd seen the weaponry and he didn't want to be caught in that sort of cross-fire.

But the odds were against him.

Valk appeared at the end of the corridor, his automatic raised as though about to fire.

It wasn't a chance Ben was prepared to take. At least, not with Polly's life.

He let her go and she ran back into the outer office.

Valk didn't fire... but came on relentlessly. Ben didn't stay to risk the consequences. After all, Valk might have a good memory; he might remember that he didn't owe Ben any favours!

Ben doubled back into the office as well.

He felt like a rat in a trap. It would only be a second or two before the Machine caught up with them.

There was no way out. But at least they could play for time.

He took Polly's hand. 'Right. Let's see how things are with Wotan.'

He led her into the inner office.

Brett and Krimpton looked at them in confusion. For the first time they seemed to indicate some alarm. Was that transmitted from Wotan?

'Why are you here?' demanded Brett.

'You've got a visitor,' Ben told him.

Neither of the two men spoke, but Wotan came to life with a vengeance. His whole framework shook. 'Valk!'

There was no doubting the fury in that synthetic voice.

'Valk!' And perhaps, as well as fury, Ben thought he could detect something else... Fear! But surely such a machine had no emotion; he was probably imagining things.

He pulled Polly behind him, and stood facing the door.

The Doctor tried to fine-tune the receiver as he sat in the car. 'There's something wrong,' he said. 'He's trying to transmit a message.'

'That machine is trying to tell you something?' Sir Charles didn't believe it.

'Exactly... Now what's it saying? What?... What?' The sound came through in erratic pulses which the Doctor was attempting to

unscramble. ‘Others?... Others?... What can it mean "others"?’

‘Other machines?’ suggested Sir Charles. ‘Other people?’

‘Of course! Other people! There are other people there!

People for whom I have not calculated in my programme!... Good gracious!’ He began to scramble from the car.

‘What is it?’

‘That girl! And Ben, of course... I should have guessed!

If Valk has to fire...!’

‘Then stop him!’

‘There’s no way... once he registers Wotan.’

The Doctor disappeared into the entrance of the Tower.

‘Doctor!’

There was no stopping him.

Sir Charles signalled to a watching group of officials further down the road and hurried into the building. He turned to see the Doctor disappearing into the lift.

It seemed an eternity as Ben waited for Valk to appear.

Perhaps the machine had changed its mind again, and gone limping off elsewhere.

But he knew that was a false hope. More likely Valk was planning the attack, for without doubt that was why it was here. The Doctor had obviously set this up, using one machine against the other, having so manipulated Valk that it was now about to turn its formidable powers on the very machine that had created it.

And Ben was caught in the middle, with this stubborn girl who didn’t want to be rescued.

She even tried to push him aside as he stood in front to protect her.

‘It’s for your own good,’ he told her.

‘Attack Valk!’ Wotan was calling. ‘Attack!’

But neither Brett nor Krimpton seemed to know what to do.

Valk appeared in the doorway of the outer office.

Polly raised a clenched fist and ran towards him. She, at least, intended to defend Wotan.

But Ben caught her, and dragged her to the floor, as Wotan let fly with a battery of lights. They acted as a screen across the doorway to the other office. Valk would have to pass through that screen if he were to get in. And once in those deadly rays, what might happen? The problem didn’t occur to Valk as the War Machine lurched on.

The Doctor came down the corridor as quickly as he could.

He didn’t actually break into a run, but he came close to it.

What did disturb him was the sound of Sir Charles and some other people racing up the stairs.

‘Keep back!’ he shouted. ‘You can do nothing here.’ He saw Valk disappear into the outer office, and he fumbled with a piece of equipment he had put together; but time had been too short. He could have devised a direction-controller, but this was not it, and Valk ploughed on regardless of the deadly screen of light.

The impact was electrical in every sense. There was a blinding flash as if lightning had struck, and Valk buckled under the shock. Smoke oozed from his body, but there was still the strength and resolve to continue the programme. And Valk sprayed Wotan with a burst of light and fire.

Wotan was still issuing orders, but now the voice was badly distorted. It wasn’t easy to understand what was being demanded: ‘Valk, you will retire! You are to obey Wotan! You are forbidden to fire!’

There was another burst from Valk.

‘This is an order!’ The voice was now a screech. ‘You will no longer fire!’

The next burst ripped away part of Wotan’s protective panel.

Wotan reacted with a blaze of lights that tore the weapon from Valk and left the attacker defenceless.

‘Go! You are to go!’ screamed Wotan.

But it was impossible for Valk to be diverted. The great Machine, leaning heavily to one side, limping forward, smoke now wafting from all parts, a smell of burning, wildly unsteady, barged its way across the room towards Wotan.

‘I am Wotan! You must obey!’

That was a forlorn hope. There was no holding Valk. As a battery of burning rays played over its casing and the whole figure wilted, the metallic hands reached out to clutch Wotan’s shattered structure.

‘Keep away! Keep back!’

Wotan poured out a current of power. The shape of Valk began to blur – the outline was melting.

But the hands had closed round the computer’s panels, ripping them and tossing them aside. Inner circuits were exposed, a battery of instruments were shattered – Wotan’s body was dismembered and the entrails spilled over the floor.

There was a faint cry from somewhere within.

‘You will both be destroyed,’ shouted Brett.

‘Wotan must be saved,’ said Krimpton. He pushed himself forward between the Machines. Neither appeared to be aware of him. Flesh was no protection in such a clash, and Krimpton slipped to the ground.

As the Doctor entered the room he was in time to see Valk take the full force of the dynamic power Wotan had left. The impact sent Valk staggering. The Machine stayed on what was left of its shattered limbs for a few seconds, then raised both arms high above its head – much as Ben had seen it do in the Covent Garden warehouse – and brought them down with a sickening crash on what was left of Wotan.

When the blaze of lights faded and the smoke thinned, there was little left that was recognisable, and from what there was it was impossible to tell where one machine ended and the other began.

Ben helped Polly from the ground. She was like someone who had awakened from a heavy sleep.

‘What’s happened?’ she asked.

‘You’re alive,’ said Ben simply.

The doorway behind the Doctor filled with a crowd of men, Sir Charles at their head.

‘Good heavens! Are you all right, Doctor?’

‘Perfectly all right, but I fear there is nothing left of our two machines.’

‘And Krimpton?’

The Doctor gently cleated the debris from around the fallen man.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said. ‘I’m afraid there is little we can do for him.’

Like Polly, Brett stood looking around the office in a daze. ‘Where am I?’ he asked.

‘He will need help,’ said the Doctor. ‘You must get him to hospital.’

Sir Charles took the Doctor aside anxiously. ‘The other War Machines?’ he said. ‘What about them, Doc-tor? It is now midday.’

‘You will find them all immobilised. They can do nothing without Wotan’s order... and that will never come.’

‘Thank heavens for that.’ Sir Charles gave a sigh of relief.

An attendant helped Brett, stepping across the wreckage of the room. As he went Brett began to recognise those round him.

‘Sir Charles?’ he said tentatively. ‘And Polly?’

‘I understand you will be all right,’ said Sir Charles.

‘But what has been happening here?’ Brett gestured to his office.

‘I think that at a later date the Doctor here will be able to explain many things.’ Sir Charles turned to indicate the Doctor... but he wasn’t by his side. Indeed, he wasn’t in the room. ‘Good gracious! Where is he? I didn’t see him go!’

There was a hurried search for the Doctor. He wasn’t to be found anywhere in the Tower.

‘That’s very strange... very puzzling...’

## 13

## We Can’t Stay Long

The Doctor guessed that Sir Charles and his friends would have many other questions, and some of them he would not be prepared to answer. It was best to take evasive action; besides, his task was now over and there were only a few loose ends to be tidied up. The authorities would be very capable of handling them. In addition, the Doctor knew at that very moment there would be a number of men and women who had taken part in the work-forces dotted round London, contributing to the construction of the War Machines, who would now be coming out of a strange dream, perhaps experiencing something of a shock as they found themselves where they were.

But they would soon get over that. They would have very little memory of what had happened these last few days, but enough of the mystery would be solved for mankind to understand that it had escaped a dire future under the rule of efficient but totally heartless and purely logical machines. The Doctor wondered whether mankind would take that lesson to heart. Well, that was not his business. He had done what he could in the situation. He couldn’t force the inhabitants of any planet to act for their own ultimate good.

‘Where is that wretched girl?’

The Doctor had been pacing up and down in a quiet London square, keeping an eye on the TARDIS in one corner, while watching for the arrival of his companion.

Now he came to a stop and looked with a frown along the street. A number of busy pedestrians hurried by, but no sign of Dodo.

‘I distinctly said in my message... I made it quite clear...

Of course she may have been held up in traffic... London is becoming...’ But he couldn’t really find an excuse for her.

The message he had sent emphasised the importance of keeping to a schedule. She hadn’t ever been so late before.

But he had to admit to himself that ever since they had left Steven to help run the planet with Jano and the Savages, Dodo had never been quite herself.

‘A pity,’ mused the Doctor. ‘But then...’

He took the key of the TARDIS from his pocket. It was going to be a sad business travelling alone in Space after the company of his many young friends. Nevertheless he had a duty...

‘Doctor!’

He turned back. Someone was running down the street towards him.

‘Doctor!’

Not just one person... two.

Polly and Ben hurried up, out of breath.

‘Well, well, my child.’ The Doctor hid the key behind his back. ‘I’m glad to see you have recovered so completely.

That dreadful business at the Tower... Enough to upset anyone.’

‘I never felt better in my life,’ said Polly cheerfully.

‘And you, Ben. Have you got over that very odd experience?’

‘Enjoyed every minute of it, Doc,’ grinned Ben.

‘Are we glad we found you!’ said Polly. ‘Sir Charles has been looking everywhere these last two days.’

‘Ah yes... I had one or two things to do,’ said the Doctor.

Then he frowned. ‘How did you know I would be here?’

‘Dodo told us.’

‘Dodo?’

‘Yes. I’ve got a message from her. She says she’s feeling much better, but she would like to stay in London.’

‘She wants to stay here?’

‘After all, it *is* her home. She hopes you don’t mind..

And she sends her love.’

‘Her love! Ha! She’s staying in London, and she sends her love! The

ingratitude of it... I take her across Time and Space, and now she...'

'Come again, Doc?' Ben was puzzled. 'What's that about Time and Space?'

'Nothing. Nothing, my boy... A figure of speech... It means, all over the place.'

Both Ben and Polly were looking at him with interest.

What could the Doctor mean exactly?

The Doctor was suddenly brisk. 'Well, you two young people. You'll want to be on your way... Things to do, and all that... If you see Dodo, give her my very best wishes. A splendid girl.' He shook hands abruptly with both of them.

They had the distinct impression that he was hurrying them away. 'Goodbye, Polly... Goodbye, Ben. You were a great help. My thanks to you both.'

He waved to them and walked briskly away.

''Bye, Doc.'

Ben was about to go, but Polly signalled to him to stop just round the corner.

'Couldn't get rid of us fast enough, could he,' said Ben.

'The old so-and-so.'

'Sssh!' Polly signalled for silence.

She turned to peer back down the road.

'There's something very odd about this,' she whispered.

'Like what?'

'See what he's doing?'

The Doctor was hurrying to the corner of the square.

'Where's he going?'

'There's a Police Box there.'

‘What’s the Doc got to do with a Police Box?’ asked Ben.

‘He’s stopped.’

The Doctor stood outside the TARDIS. There must be no further delay.

‘He’s got a key or something... He’s opening the door!...

He’s going in!’

They couldn’t believe it as the Doctor disappeared into the Box!

‘What on earth can he be going to do in there?’ Ben was baffled.

‘Let’s find out,’ said Polly.

‘How?’

‘One way, isn’t there?’ she said. She started off down the square.

‘Hold on... Look Polly... What can we...?’ Ben was doubtful.

‘He’s not going to get rid of us *that* easily,’ said Polly.

She was smiling as she headed for the Police Box.

Ben hung back. ‘I suppose the old Doc’s entitled –’

Polly interrupted. ‘Well, are you coming... or not?’ She had her hand on the door; it opened a little.

Ben shrugged. ‘Right... Might as well... But don’t forget, we can’t stay long, only a couple of minutes... See what’s going on.’ He followed Polly into the TARDIS.

The door closed.

It was a matter of three or four seconds before the sound of some mechanism started up within the Box. A whirling noise... Something was spinning... Something was...

The corner of the square was both silent and empty.

The Police Box was no longer there.

# Document Outline


- Front cover
- Rear cover
- Title page
- Copyright
- Contents
- 1 The Home-Coming
- 2 The Super-Computer
- 3 A Night Out
- 4 Servant turned Master
- 5 Putting the Team Together
- 6 Working for the Cause
- 7 A Demonstration of Power
- 8 The One Who Got Away
- 9 Attack and Defence
- 10 Taking to the Streets
- 11 Setting the Trap
- 12 The Showdown
- 13 We Can't Stay Long

# Table of Contents

1 The Home-Coming
2 The Super-Computer
3 A Night Out
4 Servant turned Master
5 Putting the Team Together
6 Working for the Cause
7 A Demonstration of Power
8 The One Who Got Away
9 Attack and Defence
10 Taking to the Streets
11 Setting the Trap
12 The Showdown
13 We Can’t Stay Long